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THE GERMAN ARMY

***** *By* *****

HERBERT ROSINSKI

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TO
SIR WYNDHAM DEEDES

FOREWORD

The original version of this study was published under circumstances which not only made a definite treatment of the subject out of the question but even prevented me from explaining its aims and acknowledging its shortcomings.

Since that time so much new material has become available and so much has happened that the present edition has become to all intents and purposes practically a new book. Only the first four chapters, less immediately affected by the events of these last years, have been left essentially as they stood, except for the evolution of the German school of strategy, which has been entirely recast in the light of recent publications and of my own further researches. The breakdown of the old German Army in the Revolution and its resurrection in the Reichswehr and the new army demanded complete and detailed reconsideration both in the light of recent events as well as of the highly-important revelations that have become available during the last years.

From the memoirs of General von Seeckt, now made accessible to us by his biographer, General von Rabenau, as well as from other first-hand information which they confirmed and elucidated, it has become possible to trace for the first time the "inner history" of the German army during the past quarter of a century in all its fateful coherence.

Complementing the six historical chapters of the present work, is a second section made up of four analytical chapters dealing with such fundamental aspects of the German military system as the organization of the supreme direction and command; the peculiar system of the Great General Staff, to which the German Army in the present conflict no less than in the past, has owed so much of its efficiency; and the current ideas of the German Army. A final chapter deals with the strategy of the German Army in the present conflict.

It remains for me to express my deeply felt gratitude to those whose kind assistance has helped to make this new wartime edition possible. At the head is Colonel Joseph I. Greene, Editor of *The Infantry Journal*, to whom the credit for its inception is entirely due and who, during the long period of its completion—far longer and more difficult than either of us had anticipated, has given me his support with unflagging generosity. Major

Harvey A. DeWeerd of his staff has also given invaluable help.

The generosity of the Rockefeller Foundation by its grant extended to me through the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy has made the whole work possible. Dean Halford L. Hoskins of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy has accompanied me on its course with a liberality and understanding kindness for which it is difficult to find adequate expression. Finally I am indebted for numerous courtesies to the staffs of the Library of Congress and the New York Public Library.

HERBERT ROSINSKI

Washington

December, 1943

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INTRODUCTION

Even in its shorter original form this book proved especially useful to British and American military readers, not only as a penetrating discussion of the world's most powerful armed forces at the time, but as the one concise account in English of the German Army's development. In Part Two of the much longer revision, brought up to date by the author, *The German Army* contains a far more complete study of the growth of the German high command and staff, material of particular value in understanding the present German Army.

Dr. Rosinski writes as a German whose life work has been the study of war. But to an extensive knowledge of German military thought he adds the perspective of a military analyst and thinker of high ability. His association with the staffs of the higher German military and naval schools, until circumstances forced him to leave Germany for freer soil, also enables him to write with authority of the present German command and staff as well as that of the past.

The German Army comprises by far the strongest forces still in the field against the United Nations. Its record through nearly five years of fighting, in defeat as in victory, is one of vigor, efficiency, and thoroughness in the application of tactical method and strategical principle.

Its successes of 1940 and 1941 were on the greatest scale the world had seen, the result of long and carefully laid plans that took every small and large detail into consideration. There were military errors made, for no army is a machine that runs without ever getting out of order. The human minds directing any army are fallible, and notwithstanding the improvement in modern means of communication the commanders of an army that fights over hundreds and thousands of square miles can never know in full detail and precision the state of their forces at a given moment. There are interferences by the opposing forces, breakdowns in sending orders and messages, and misunderstandings in receiving them. Since peacetime training can never be held in the conditions of war, training extends on into the earlier battles; and since men are killed, wounded, and worn out in every battle from the first one on, and these replaced by others for the next, the battle training of new men may be said to extend throughout a war. This, too, will always prevent the

attainment of perfection in combat.

Thus training and combat together are a process, not of eventually avoiding all error, but of reducing it and keeping it reduced. But the mistakes of gravest consequence are often made at the top—by the highest military command or by the political heads of the nation who are over the military commander. It seems certain that such mistakes have been of highest import to Germany in the present war, though it may be a long time before the full account is known.

The central fact remains, however, that the four-year record of the armed forces of our chief enemy in the Second World War is one of efficient battle with errors kept near the minimum which any army could hope for. It takes nothing from the victories of the great Soviet Russian Army, or those of the British Army and our own in Africa and Europe, to say that handling of the German retreats over hundreds of miles and the accompanying delaying actions have been, from a professional point of view, as remarkable as the German victories that preceded them. This is not an academic, textbook opinion, but one arrived at by the armies that have driven the Germans before them. And in the future study of war, these most difficult withdrawals as well as the German offensives will unquestionably receive extensive study in the schools of every army.

The professional soldier of other nations also thinks of the German Army as having stood among the best trained fighting forces for nearly two centuries. He knows, too, that during most of this period it has led all others in military readiness and efficiency.

The professional soldier is entrusted by his own country—and this includes the democracies, our own among them—with the responsibility for staying alert to military developments the world over. And within the limits set by the means made available to him, he is also responsible for keeping his own army abreast, and ready to meet trouble if trouble comes. If these means are considerably limited, as to a degree where technical military research is held to the minimum, where practice in assembling and operating with large military units is impossible, and where modern equipment becomes so sparingly available that five to ten years pass before much of the army has it in hand, then professional military men, if they do not grow completely discouraged, turn more than ever to study the more modern forces of other nations.

Our own Army received its first thorough training for battle at the hands of a German soldier of fortune, Baron von Steuben. Where Von Steuben came from, what his former allegiances had been, how despotic or otherwise his former masters had been, or even what he thought about the rights and wrongs of the American struggle with the mother country (if Steuben thought of those things at all)—were unimportant matters to Washington and the other Patriot leaders. What was of utmost importance, especially to Washington, was that Steuben had served, so Benjamin Franklin had written from Paris, as “Lieut. Genl. in the king of Prussia’s Service, whom he attended in all his campaigns, being his Aid de Camp, quartermaster Genl. etc.” In writing to Congress to ask that Steuben be given rank as major general, Washington refers to Steuben’s supposed years of experience in the armies of Frederick the Great as “Service in the first military school in Europe.”

It is no condonation of the German attempt to conquer the world, against which we turn the full power of our country as this edition of *The German Army* is published, to say that the German Army has continued to be our “first military school” for most of the century and a half since Washington called it that. Nor to say that since the day of Steuben at Valley Forge American military leaders have closely watched the German military developments, studied intensively the German military thought, and often adapted German military organization and tactical methods to our own uses.

Consequently, German military methods had their impact upon every commander of American troops since the beginning of the nation. And those who have shaped our ways of fighting have looked more often to the German than to any other foreign sources of military ideas. They have found profitable a close examination of German thought on warfare, not simply on the higher levels of military theory, but also in the practical sphere of instruction for the individual soldier and the combat unit.

In this book the author writes as one who admires many aspects of the German military tradition, though he has no sympathy for the political aims which have brought the German Army again into a world conflict. This military tradition has often been condemned as a chief cause of bloodshed through the centuries, and those who built the tradition, as a succession of increasingly dangerous proponents of conquest and destruction. Part of that tradition, however, consists in a continuous

attention to military development, without which no army is prepared to serve and protect its people. Had military development been more continuously and attentively fostered in Britain and the United States, a first World War, let alone a second, might conceivably have been avoided.

All soldiers usually find something to admire in the competence of their enemies. It may be the tradition of an army, as with the British, to express freely and even formally the opinion that the foe is a capable fighter when he is. Or the opinion may be chiefly held to individual expression as in our own Army. Such expressions are also used sometimes in explaining defeat or incomplete success. The danger for a soldier lies, not in saying how well the enemy fought, but in the overconfidence that may result from an erroneously low estimate of his enemy's abilities. Especially must commanders and their staffs be accurate in such estimates.

In war or peace, the soldier must judge his enemies and potential enemies. To do so he must use common terms of approval and disapproval, for there is no special military way of saying such things as "The German Army is well led and fights admirably." But such words, spoken within a military frame of reference, do not extend to admiration of what the enemy may stand for—his political beliefs, his customs, his national aggressiveness.

This also arises from the fact that the general principles and methods of waging war do not differ greatly from one army to another. Armies have always learned from each other, in battle and in the study of each other's weapons and tactics in time of peace. The same general types of activity are called for on both sides, and similar language is used in discussing and directing them—a language that includes few special expressions for military excellences and military shortcomings.

One military excellence essential to any army's success is the soldier's pride of profession. This quality is evident on most of the pages of *The German Army*. And this quality depends in large measure on the relationship of the soldier to the nation for which he fights.

So long as armies and navies continue to be necessary in maintaining the existence of nations or groups of nations, the professional soldier must stand on an equal footing with all professional men as the servants of their nations. There can be no general shrinking from him and his work simply because that work may be at any time to deal in destruction and death.

If there is such shrinking, and the soldier and his work become viewed with a general abhorrence by people whose further existence may at any future time depend upon his competence—if they become viewed as minor and barely tolerated activities soon to be dispensed with in a better world—then is the future year of a new war more likely to come with a precipitous rush of events than the year of the better world.

We know that in Germany it has been possible to develop prejudice and hate, and a vast military strength as their instrument, in an amazingly brief time, and that this has brought on the world's greatest war. We know that in our own country and the others of the United Nations there was not, in the beginning, a general understanding of even the physical threat to the world; that not all men understand it now; that many who willingly work and fight have still not shared the conception of the whole threat, either from inability or lack of opportunity to grasp it. And we know that there are some whose fixed minds have never shared it and will never share it, among whom, of course, are the men and women who oppose the effort of their own nations at war.

Perhaps the hardest thing for a peace-minded, non-military man to understand is that the American soldier, though his task is to handle and develop deadly weapons, is first and last a servant of the state, putting those weapons into use when he is ordered to do so. The order comes from the people through their Congress and their President. No man in uniform urged this nation into the war we are fighting, nor was the decision of 1917 the result of Army or Navy influence on the people or their representatives. Individual members of the armed services had their private opinions about entering both wars. But for one professional soldier who said, even to friends, "We should go to war," there were a hundred who simply said "War is most probably coming, and again we will not be ready for it. Let's do what we can to get ready in whatever time may be left."

It was not the same in Germany where, since the days of Frederick's father, the Army officer stood, not merely on a level with other professional men but generally well above them, and for centuries had exercised a high degree of political influence, often urging war upon the rulers of his nation. These things go back, as Dr. Rosinski shows, to the early development of the German belief that "war is an inevitable element of human existence."

The professional soldier in America believes that, too, but with a qualification. He believes that war is inevitable so long as there are powerful nations in the world where such a belief is held; or where the general behavior of the people and their rulers indicates the possibility of their going to war tomorrow or a quarter of a century from tomorrow. He believes that the armed strength of the defender of peace will always be needed to put down the armed strength of the would-be conqueror until the last thought of conquest has gone from the mind of man.

Dr. Rosinski traces the history, traditions, organization, doctrines, and tactical tendencies of the German Army with admirable clarity and thoroughness. He also discusses the inner strains that have existed within that Army during the Nazi period, strains that have grown in seriousness and effect as the opposing armies have steadily advanced toward German soil. But these internal conflicts are not for the United Nations to count upon primarily. The only way in which disintegration of the superbly organized German system of command and staff can be achieved with certainty is through its military destruction as in Tunisia. The hard task, still ahead, is to defeat with our Allies the German fighting forces, which under that system still continue to form a tenacious and formidable opponent. A first and essential step toward completing that task is to gain an understanding of the history, nature, and methods of the German Army.

COLONEL JOSEPH I. GREENE,
Editor, The Infantry Journal

Washington
February 1944

PART ONE

Chapter One

FREDERICK THE GREAT

I

The German Army begins with Frederick the Great. The thousand years of war and strife that preceded him, of glorious victories and terrible defeats, the splendor of the Holy Roman Empire maintaining the peace and justice of Christendom upon the point of its sword, the terrible miseries of the Thirty Years' War, when Germany became the battlefield for all the feuds of Europe, today are history—they are nothing more. They have left their profound imprint upon the German nation, they have hammered into it the conviction—so alien to the Anglo-Saxon race secure behind its “silver walls”—that war is an inevitable element of human existence. But they are no longer a living force, determining the structure and the spirit of the present German Army.

With Frederick the Great begins the living memory of the Prussian Army, into which today, with the incorporation of the Austrian forces, all German contingents are fused. Not that he himself created it, or contributed any notable material innovation to its development. In the military as in all other fields Frederick's greatness lay not in the inauguration of a new epoch, but in the consummate expression which he gave to the age into which he had been born, the age of absolute monarchy, mercantilist policy, and standing armies. His army, like his state, was the heritage of an unusually brilliant line of predecessors, a heritage which he brought to perfection, but did not alter and failed to preserve, just as his strategy, for all its daring, remained within the narrow limits of its time.

And yet it is with him and not with any of his forefathers that the living tradition of the Prussian Army really begins. For by his own heroic example far more than by any conscious effort, he gave it what was more than its mere existence and an outward organization, destined to break down within less than a generation after his death, its “inner form,” its immortal spirit. On the

anvil of his battles, in the terrible struggle in which he maintained himself for seven endless years against an overwhelming coalition, the Prussian Army was forged into something greater than its ephemeral pride and weakness, glory and faults. Out of the turmoil and strife, the blood and fire of that great conflict, something new was born, something that did not die, when its outer forms broke down, but was to survive through all changes and vicissitudes, through external catastrophes and internal disruptions: the spirit of a great tradition, the soul of an army; and more than that, a new form of life, narrow, harsh, with many faults and shortcomings; yet with all its defects a mighty spiritual force not ignoble in its subordination and sacrifice of everything to one idea—duty.

II

After the terrible ordeal of the Thirty Years' War, German political life had fallen into a state of profound stagnation. The leading dynasty, the Imperial House of Habsburg, was more and more preoccupied by its non-German (Hungarian, Italian, Slavonic) interests, above all by the reviving struggle with the Turks, bound by its close connection with the papacy and everywhere hemmed in by the extreme conservatism of the "estates" of its manifold and diverse territories. Moreover, owing to its pride in the vastness of its possessions and the security engendered by the victorious campaigns of Prince Eugene of Savoy—a great captain, rather than a great military organizer—it had utterly failed to realize the necessity for a better mobilization and concentration of its forces. Most of the German princes on the other hand were content to bury themselves in the narrow circle of their immediate duties and interests. Many of them were men of excellent character and intentions, God-fearing, conscientious, honest rulers of their flocks, just as there were plenty of licentious and plump imitators of the splendors of the *Roi Soleil* and of his country in their ranks. But their souls failed to rise above the petty squabbles and political intrigues of the Empire to the wider field of European politics.

Into this state of torpor, weakness, and indecision the active policy of the Brandenburg electors of the House of Hohenzollern fell like a stone into a stagnant pool. The Hohenzollerns were not only an unusually able dynasty; the state of their possessions itself demanded from them a more energetic policy than from almost any other leading house of Empire. Saxony, Han-

over, Bavaria, all formed more or less coherent and contiguous territories, easy to supervise and to protect. The Hohenzollerns alone had their possessions strewn over the whole of the Empire and even beyond its frontiers. In the extreme west, on the border of the Netherlands, they owned a series of small principalities: Cleves, Mark, Ravensberg, Geldres, Moers, Lingen, and Techlenburg. In the center lay the bulk of their estates, the Electorate of Brandenburg and the greater part of Pomerania. In the east, surrounded on all sides by the decrepit monarchy of Poland, of which it formed a fief, lay the second main part of their domains, East Prussia, the former state of the Teutonic Knights. Thus the Hohenzollerns were constantly in danger of being involved in the quarrels both of East and West Europe, not only alternately, but simultaneously. Only by a policy of exceptional ability and daring could a dynasty maintain itself in these circumstances, and even to maintain itself was not enough. Brandenburg-Prussia, owing to its geographical position, was forced either to rise or else to go down altogether.

The wide spread of their possessions, on the other hand, enabled the Hohenzollerns to keep their fingers in many political pies at the same time and greatly helped them in adapting their policies to the changing exigencies of the moment. It was through the rapidity with which he changed his alliances and was able to play off one of his masters against the other that the first of the great Hohenzollerns, Frederick the Great's grandfather, Frederick William, the "Great Elector," was able to gain a certain measure of independence or at least of freedom of movement—and incidentally a reputation of political unreliability that his house was long in overcoming and that his great-grandson, for the same reason, was to earn to an even greater degree.

Yet with all his versatility Frederick William was unable to achieve the freedom of action for which he strove with such desperate energy, because he was unable to maintain the standing army which he had created after the Thirty Years' War and by the end of his life brought to the respectable strength of 31,000 men from the resources of his poor and devastated territories. Like the other German princes of his time, he and even more his weak son, Frederick I, were therefore forced to subordinate their wishes and interests to the policies of their paymasters (Austria, The Netherlands, Great Britain) whom they might change, but could not dispense with. It was the outstand-

ing achievement of his grandson, Frederick William I, Frederick the Great's father, and the decisive step which raised the House of Hohenzollern over the other German princes, that by a policy of the strictest and most stringent economy he succeeded in liberating himself completely from all dependence upon foreign subsidies and thus made his army, increased by him from 38,000 to more than 76,000 men, free exclusively for the furtherance of his own interests.

This unique achievement was bought at no small cost. Among the German principalities, Prussia was by far the poorest in resources, in climate, in population, industry, and trade. If eventually she rose above them all, it was because she literally starved herself into greatness. To win the free disposal of her forces the whole life of the country had to be organized for the sole purpose of serving the needs of its army. Between 1713 and 1732 the Prussian state spent no less than 4 to 5 million thaler on the average a year upon its army, but only 1 million upon all its other obligations taken together. Nor did the state stop there. The greatest achievement of Frederick William I's reign, next to the stabilization of his exchequer, was the mobilization of the human resources of his territories for the reconstruction of his army. In France, the model prototype of absolute kingship, the monarchy had crushed the opposition of the nobles in the hundred years from the wars of the Huguenots to those of the Fronde; but it had failed to integrate them into the new structure. The court monarchy of Louis XIV had established its control over the aristocracy only by tearing it from its roots in the country and concentrating it at Versailles. But in taming it to the inanities and intrigues of court life and of the struggle for the royal favor, it brought about the demoralization that contributed so much to the outbreak of the Revolution. In Prussia the military monarchy of Frederick William I succeeded where that of the "Grand Monarque" had failed. The Great Elector had broken the resistance of the "Junkers." His grandson completed his work by converting the erstwhile rebels to his service and transforming them into the most trustworthy pillars of his state and army. Under him the aristocracy of his manifold domains—carefully analysed by him according to its qualifications in his various political testaments—learned to feel itself a homogeneous body, proudly called by the common name of "Prussian," and to consider the service of its king and country not only as the most honorable, but as its natural profession.

But not without profound reluctance and bitter opposition. In the beginning many noble families violently objected to seeing their children drafted for the King's service; but Frederick William I, undaunted, did not shrink from sending his messengers to their country houses to requisition the boys by force for his "Corps de Cadets" which he had made into the main school for his future officers. Nor did that resistance survive the first generation.

For with all its hardships the King's service had much to offer to the Prussian aristocracy, poor as it was in comparison with the French nobility. A report of 1764 relates the curious case of a village in Pomerania where all the inhabitants were of gentle birth with the exception of the shepherd and the watchman, and even these were married to gentlewomen. Moreover the Prussian aristocracy lacked that other great outlet, the Church. The remarkable fact about the Prussian Army was not so much that it served as a career for the younger sons and poor branches of the aristocracy, but that the heirs of the families and the richest members were expected to consecrate themselves to its service as well. In the lists of the Prussian Army of the eighteenth century we find among countless officers who had nothing but their pay, their uniform, and their sword, others possessing three, four, even six or eight manors. Only the high nobility on the whole did not take to the service, thereby provoking Frederick the Great's profound suspicion and condemnation, but on the other hand even the reigning sovereigns of the princely houses of Anhalt and Braunschweig did not think themselves above serving in the King of Prussia's army.

For in exchange for all the hardship, discipline, and privations of his career the Prussian officer was raised by Frederick William I to a unique status such as he acquired in no other country, either before or after. Throughout Europe the officer was essentially the representative of a specific function. If the social prestige of his order was on the whole high, it was because usually, though by no means invariably, it was recruited from those in a well born position and did not necessarily carry a special dignity of its own. This was particularly so in Southern Germany, where in Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden, and Hesse the local aristocracy preferred to study law and enter the administration rather than the army, and the officers' corps contained many members of low social origin. In some of the ecclesiastical principalities, for example the archbishopric of Mayence, where

the soldiers' prestige was particularly low and the exclusiveness of society particularly pronounced, no officer would have dared to present himself in uniform, nor would any officer have been received in society unless he was a gentleman by birth.

In Prussia the situation was completely different. There, Frederick William I, assuming personally the role of the first officer in his army, raised the rank of officer to the first place in the state by making every single member of it not only a gentleman, but what was more, the companion-in-arms of his king. The uniform which he introduced at court instead of the effeminate French dress, and which he himself wore all his life as a symbol of that fact—"the King's coat" as it was henceforth called even in official pronouncements down to the end of the Hohenzollern monarchy—thus fulfilled a double function. It united the monarch with his brother-in-arms, and on the other hand, it united the officers among themselves into one great community, knowing many differences of military rank and function, but none of social standing. It was characteristic of that state of things that in the Prussian Army of the eighteenth century no officer wore any special badge denoting his particular rank, with the sole exception of the generals, who were distinguished by a white ostrich feather on their hat and who generally wore the special uniform of their regiments. In the same spirit, every officer down to the lowest enjoyed the privilege of addressing himself directly by an "immediate application" to his king and master.

As a result of this exceptional position accorded to him the Prussian officer found himself exalted even above the other servants of his king. A "free-corporal," the lowest rank in the officer's career, was the equal of a senior war councillor, and if he had already served in the field, took precedence of him. Frederick the Great himself wrote to a protégé who thanked him for his promotion to court rank: "In my state every lieutenant comes before a 'lord-in-waiting.'" Both Frederick William I and his son often employed officers on administrative or diplomatic missions or entrusted them with the control of civilian officials, because they found them better disciplined and better able to enforce their authority, and above all, trained to look personally after the tasks entrusted to them.

The mobilization of the aristocracy of his territories for his service was one pillar upon which Frederick William built his army. The other was his famous "canton-system," by which the

whole manpower of his territories was declared liable to military service. With the rise of the standing army the remnants of the old territorial militias, based upon the traditional obligation of the people for local defense, had gradually withered away, and one of the first acts of Frederick William's reign had been to suppress these wholly inadequate levies altogether and to base the defense of his territories exclusively upon the standing army. As, however, the maintenance of the army by voluntary recruitment exclusively proved both unreliable and unsatisfactory, he was forced to supplement it by legalizing and concentrating in his own hands the system by which his officers had begun to enroll suitable recruits from their own estates, while letting them continue to follow their occupations until they were needed to serve. By the famous "Canton Regulations" of 1727 the whole Prussian territory was divided into districts, the so-called "cantons," which were then assigned to the individual regiments as localities from which to enlist the men suitable for military service. These so-called "cantonists"—or as many of them as were eventually needed—served in time of peace for two months with the colors; for the rest of the year they were sent home to earn their own livings, thus relieving the army of the cost of their support. On the other hand their enlistment was normally for the term of their natural lives and was only under Frederick the Great's successor reduced to ten or twelve years.

Thus by claiming that "all inhabitants of the state are born to bear arms," Frederick William I by a stroke of his pen transformed the former obligation to serve for the defense of the local territory into the new obligation to serve in the standing army. Yet the new system was anything but a general conscription. Large groups of the population, the sons of noblemen and of all parents with a fortune of more than 10,000 thalers, were exempt from it from the beginning. Many further exemptions, of whole territories, towns, classes, corporations, and even of individuals, were granted in the course of time. In practice the whole middle class down to the more prosperous artisans was exempted; actual service fell upon the shoulders of the lowest orders, small artisans, servants, and above all peasants and agricultural laborers. But even among these there were many exemptions in favor of well-to-do peasants, only sons, and others. In 1806, when the system came to an end, it was calculated that out of 8,700,000 theoretically liable to service just over 4,000,000 were actually enrolled by the "canton" system.

By this measure the Prussian state insured for itself a permanent supply of inexpensive and reliable soldiers that formed the foundation of its army. Recruitment abroad was not abolished, but the "cantonists" remained the backbone of the force, giving it both its coherence and its character. Recruited from the same district and bound by regional and personal ties, they were less inclined to desert each other in a tight corner than mercenaries gathered from all over Europe. The cantons themselves not only vied with each other in sending their best men to the colors, but proved themselves an inexhaustible reserve of manpower. Without the canton system Frederick the Great could never have survived the ordeal of the Seven Years' War.

Hand in hand with this provision for the supply of officers and men went a thorough reorganization of the army itself. For the first time the regiments were uniformly clothed, their uniforms and weapons manufactured at home. The strictest discipline was enforced; the royal parks of Potsdam and Berlin were transformed into parade grounds. There under the supervision of Field Marshal Prince Leopold of Anhalt Dessau, the bosom companion and chief military adviser of the King, the army through ceaseless exercise was forged into a perfect instrument of victory. The cavalry was neglected, for both Prince Leopold and the King were still under the impression derived from the War of the Spanish Succession that that arm had proved singularly inefficient. But the infantry, thanks to Prince Leopold's invention of training it to march in step, was by constant drill transformed into a moving wall of fire to which no other army had anything comparable to oppose. In the size of its territory the Prussia of Frederick William I ranked tenth amongst the states of Europe, in population thirteenth, but its army was the fourth in numbers and incomparable in quality.

Such was the army which Frederick William I left to his successor. It was his personal creation. With its 80,000 men for a population of not more than 2,500,000 it was far in excess of the reasonable needs of his country, and yet, paradoxically enough, anything but the expression of a particularly bellicose temperament. On the contrary, the most curious trait in the semi-barbaric but immensely energetic personality of its creator was the fact that he devoted his life to forging this powerful instrument without ever feeling the inclination to use, or in fact without any aptitude or inclination for, power politics. Time and again Frederick William I, who in his outlook was the typical repre-

sentative of the older generation of German princes, intensely patriotic, straightforward, blunt, uncultured except for a primitive Christianity, found himself in pursuing his rightful claims misused and double-crossed by the clever diplomats of the Habsburgs, trading upon his well-known peaceful and loyal disposition. Yet not once did his resentment lead him to vindicate his claims with the help of the force which he had created. It was as if he had forged the instrument solely for the purpose of handing it on to his successor. The question was: what would that successor do with it?

III

That question was to haunt the King's peace of mind for many years to come. For his unpsychological attempts to force his own primitive notions of a soldierly spirit and outlook upon the delicate, highly strung nature of his son merely served to arouse the son's vehement opposition and to evoke in him a general revulsion against all military activity. That aversion was not fundamentally affected even by the complete outward submission to his father's will to which Frederick saw himself constrained after the failure of his famous attempt to escape his father's tyrannical discipline and his subsequent arraignment before a court martial as a deserter. He asked, indeed, and some time later was granted, command of a regiment in the little provincial garrison of Neu-Ruppin. But that step was obviously due to the desire to escape from the even more irksome drudgery of the subaltern administrative tasks to which his father had set him with the double purpose of reforming and of preparing him for his future duties.

On the contrary, the conflict within Frederick's complex and ambiguous nature, between his sensitive temperament and his gradually awakening ambition and proud self-confidence as a future ruler, deepened as during the ensuing years of his political self-instruction and apprenticeship he came under the influence of that factor which was to play the dominant role in the clarification and development of his ideas, the humanitarian philosophy of the "enlightenment." In the works of the French philosophers and writers such as Fénelon, Bayle, Montesquieu, and above all, Voltaire, he found the ideal portrait of a "good ruler," chivalrous, humane, benevolent, devoting his life to the happiness of his subjects by the promotion of justice, peace, and order.

Under the influence of this ideal of "enlightened despotism," which was to inspire him not only with the famous claim that "the ruler was only the first servant of his people," but what was more, with the energy to live up to that claim in more than forty years of indefatigable labor—Frederick, inexperienced, eager to emulate and to win the approval of Voltaire, for a time was carried away from the hard realities of political existence. He forgot the ambitious desires of his heart and indulged in humanitarian dreams of a quiet and peaceful reign, denouncing with honest conviction the ambition of princes and the unrighteousness of aggression. Never perhaps was the urge of his passionate nature more subdued than in the autumn of 1739, only a few months before his accession to the throne, at one stroke carried him into the whirlpool of the political struggle.

Yet it was not only this youthful thirst for action and glory that was to cause his career as a ruler to differ so profoundly from the idyllic pictures in which he had indulged in his days of political irresponsibility. Another and harder taskmaster was to drive him along the steep and perilous path of incessant struggle and watchfulness on all sides, a heavy responsibility that was to dominate and overcloud his whole life and thought—the preservation of the heritage entrusted to his care in the struggle of the powers.

That task—to maintain and preserve his patrimony in the proud yet precarious position to which he had raised it amongst the powers of Europe—became the central purpose, the determining influence in Frederick's life, absorbing his thoughts and energies, moulding his character, exhausting his forces. To that supreme duty, embracing and overriding all others, he sacrificed himself body and soul: the quiet of his days and the sleep of his nights, all thought of personal happiness, even his feelings which he schooled himself to curb and suppress so as to preserve his will power unweakened and undiverted, until at last he became almost bereft of human sentiment, petrified into insensibility like an image of stone.

Yet although he gave up, without flinching, the humanitarian dreams of his youth to the hard realities of the struggle of the powers, Frederick neither forgot nor renounced them. If they could not prevail against the harsh dictates of necessities of state, at least they kept alive in his soul the consciousness of a deep, tragic conflict between that necessity and the human desire for peace and happiness, and thus prevented him from yielding too

easily to its demands. As the proud confidence with which Frederick at first had believed in his powers to foresee and control the tortuous course of political events broke down more and more under mishaps and reverses, and gave way to the bitter acknowledgment of that most nimble and unseizable of all opponents "his satanic majesty, chance," the grim game of the struggle for power became more and more a heavy and terrible burden to his weary soul. The horrors inseparable from war, "this glorious profession of arms," impressed themselves ever more deeply on his soul until he cursed the bloody work to which he was condemned. Yet, weary as he was to death, often enough forced "to tame his soul with blows," he held on at the post to which fate had called him, and in the course which necessity seemed to command. This was the call of duty to which he had surrendered his will.

This deeply tragic note in Frederick's life, which far more than the splendor of his victories has marked and endeared his memory to his people, has to this day been obscured to the world at large by the errors of his first steps. The rash impatience with which he seized the opportunity of Charles VI's death to occupy Silesia without troubling about the moral and legal vindication of his case not only embroiled him in a lifelong struggle with the House of Austria, but once and for all decided his reputation as an unscrupulous and cynical Machiavellist, particularly with the English, at that moment in alliance with his opponent. That judgment not all the moderation and heroism of his subsequent career was able to affect. Even during the Seven Years' War, when he was for a time the highly valued ally of Great Britain, the situation of the two partners was too different to allow the more fortunate of the two to understand the real bitterness of his associate's struggle. What to Great Britain was a glorious epic of colonial conquest to Frederick meant a desperate fight, not only for the newly gained province, with which, as he rightly felt, his life work stood and fell, but for the whole heritage of his house. It was a conflict which, as his initial advantages were gradually lost under the weight of the crushing superiority of his opponents, became more and more a question not so much of military considerations as of Frederick's personal capacity to stand the almost superhuman physical and moral strain of that struggle. At last in the spring of 1762 his hopes and his power of resistance were almost exhausted and the idea of suicide, so often repressed during those terrible years,

began to overpower him. Until the end of February, when the success or the failure of his last hope, an intervention by the Turks, would have declared itself, he was willing to hold out, but if that failed, he felt that he had earned the right to make an end.

Then "the miracle of the House of Brandenburg," the death of the Empress Elisabeth of Russia, intervened to save him and permit him to end that great struggle, without any gain indeed, but also without having lost a single square foot of his domains. Yet that victory had been bought at a heavy price; for it was a desperately tired and prematurely aged and bitter man who rode back to devote the last twenty-three years of his life to work day and night for the welfare of his people.

IV

In that fiery furnace not Frederick alone had been tested and not found wanting. His army too had found in it the spirit that was henceforth to sustain it through all changes down to the present day. Just as out of that common trial and triumph was born a new national consciousness knitting the widely spread territories of the Hohenzollerns together into a homogeneous entity, so the Prussian Army out of the ordeal of that desperate struggle against overwhelming odds brought home the proud feeling of its own peculiar spirit and excellence.

The formation of such a pronounced *esprit de corps* was all the more significant in view of the composition of its rank and file. For the one point in the administration of his army in which Frederick had departed from the foundations laid by his father was the degree to which he relied upon foreign recruitment rather than the resources of his own domains for the bulk of his rank and file. Whereas under Frederick William I two-thirds of the army had been native-born subjects (50,000 as against some 26,000 foreigners), under his son that ratio was almost reversed, the home elements in 1751 numbering hardly 50,000 out of a total of 132,000 men. Later on, after the Seven Years' War and particularly towards the end of his reign, the number of foreigners enrolled under his colors seems to have decreased again, though not so much from any change in Frederick's outlook, as because of the difficulties of finding the necessary recruits, which drove him to extend his search farther and farther afield beyond the confines of the Empire, to Switzerland and even to Italy.

Frederick's disinclination to make more use of the manpower

of his estates arose not merely from the wish to retain this for emergencies—although without the reserves provided by the canton system he undoubtedly would have succumbed in the Seven Years' War. It arose above all from economic considerations, which he shared with the mercantilist outlook of his age. Every soldier taken from his own population deprived the country of a useful member of its economy; every foreigner enlisted not only released a subject from such unproductive activity, but by bringing into the country a new resident, who in the intervals of his service could be sent out to earn his living as an artisan or laborer, he thus enriched its economic life by another pair of hands.

Frederick's reluctance to impose upon his territories more than the minimum of unproductive labor enabled him to raise the power and prestige of Prussia far beyond its natural forces. To maintain the position of equality or almost equality which he had established with other leading powers which were infinitely richer in every respect, he had not only like his father to stretch his meager resources to the utmost, but beyond that to borrow heavily in the form of manpower from the rapidly decaying body of the Holy Roman Empire, in particular the Free Towns and the Ecclesiastical Principalities. In all his complex negotiations with his fellow-members of the Empire we see him therefore constantly on the watch to gain new advantages for the replenishment of his forces, either to open up new areas to his recruiting agents or even to press some of the minor princes to relinquish part of their forces to him.

The men that he managed to raise in this manner could hardly—in contrast to his own “Cantonists”—be of the best. Normally, they were the scum of the population, deserters from other armies, and in time of war, even enemy prisoners. In using enemy prisoners Frederick underrated the ties which even in his age bound the soldier to his country and prince, and never more fatally than in the beginning of the Seven Years' War when he attempted to incorporate the whole rank and file of the Saxon Army, which he had forced to surrender at Pirna, into his own forces. Yet even the disastrous results of that experiment could not convince him of the danger of such a course. On the contrary, the Seven Years' War, which he had had to fight, during its latter stages at least, with indifferent material, only served to strengthen in him the conviction that the goodwill of the individual soldier counted for nothing and that all that was necessary was to keep

the army together by an iron discipline.

Yet in thus denying to the common soldier any feeling of honor Frederick ignored the rough allegiance and admiration with which the mass of his army, not only his born subjects but the foreigners in it as well, had clung to their royal hero and commander through all the blood and hardship of those years. In his youth he felt a deep and genuine interest in the rank and file of his forces and found warm words of gratitude and admiration for them, and when he entered the Seven Years' War it was with the proud feeling of commanding the best army in Europe. But under the stress of those years his outlook changed. The flower of his infantry lay dead upon the battlefields of Prague and Kolin, Leuthen, Kunersdorf, and Torgau, and the hastily trained recruits who filled their places were incapable of performing those swift and precise maneuvers upon which his most famous victories had depended. Unpleasant experiences helped to fill him with unjustifiable bitterness, until, as the tension of that terrible struggle increased, we find him more and more cursing his men as "canaille," as "brutes," claiming that the soldier should fear his officers more than the enemy.

Thus the indifferent morale of his army, together with the necessity of opposing to the numerical superiority of his enemies a superior tactical training and mobility, forced Frederick to continue, and even to intensify, the system of rigid discipline inaugurated by his father. Therefore, more than in any other force of its time, the spirit and cohesion of his army depended on the officers. The Prussian officer was the iron rivet which bound these heterogeneous and doubtful elements into the solid body of a blindly obedient machine; his control over his men was expected to be such as to enable him to lead them forward even under the heaviest fire. This inborn aptitude of command however, Frederick found, or rather fancied that he found, exclusively amongst the nobly born. The nobility of his territories were therefore the pillars upon which he built his army and with it the whole Prussian state. Hence the rigor—remarkable in a man otherwise so free of prejudices—with which in this respect he carried the policy of his father to its ultimate conclusion. Every nobleman in his domains capable of serving the state was expected to do so either as officer or as official. Service abroad was expressly forbidden under severe penalties. Every travelling abroad was made dependent upon the King's permission, which was not readily granted, for as Frederick remarked

in one of his drastic marginal comments, "Goose goes abroad; comes back again as a goose; and then they no longer want to serve."

In exchange Frederick felt the obligation no less than the necessity of caring by every means in his power for this gentry "of which the stock," as he once wrote, "is such that it deserves to be considered in every conceivable manner;" above all by giving it the exclusive right to own and purchase estates, as well as the posts in his service which the Prussian aristocracy had in the meantime learned to appreciate as a highly treasured right and to claim as a privilege. As far, therefore, as "bourgeois" elements were still tolerated by him amongst his officers, they were relegated to those branches of the service held in a lower esteem, such as the artillery and the engineers—where the officer's authority depended upon knowledge rather than inborn aptitude to command—or the second-class "garrison regiments." Yet this wish to protect his landed gentry from the competition of "bourgeois" elements is not in itself sufficient to account for the astonishing vehemence with which Frederick opposed the infiltration of the middle class into the ranks of his officers. After the Seven Years' War he ruthlessly removed from his forces the considerable number of deserving officers of bourgeois origin upon whom he had been forced to rely during that conflict, and threw open the ranks of his officers to foreign-born noblemen, not only from the Empire, but from all over Europe, France, Italy, Switzerland, Hungary, Lithuania, who had nothing but their aristocratic birth to recommend them. This fact shows clearly that another and deeper reason moved him, that in his eyes the "bourgeois" suffered from a fundamental disadvantage, making him naturally inferior as an officer to every nobleman as such, and that this disadvantage was in his opinion rooted in something deeper than the mere lack of aptitude to command.

Nothing could be a better illustration of the fundamental difference between the structure of Frederick's army and the German army today than this preference for the foreign-born nobleman rather than his own bourgeois subjects—and his reason for it. For what he believed he had found in the nobleman was above all a sentiment of which in his opinion only the nobly born were truly capable. It was the cult of honor rather than national feeling—their private honor, as gentlemen, bound up with their public honor as the King of Prussia's officers—that formed the moral foundation of Frederick's army and united

these men of widely different origin, upbringing, and character into an iron band, destined in its turn to hold together a mass which was animated neither by honor nor by national sentiment. Before that spirit of honor even Frederick, like his father, capitulated where its demands clashed with the direct interests of the State, as in the question of duelling.

As was only natural, the Prussian officer's idea of honor was determined by his functions. It demanded that he should "keep his countenance" even under the heaviest fire, not leave his post unwounded or surrender unless attacked by overwhelming numbers, and then only after having inflicted damage to the enemy which would outweigh his own loss. In all this the officer's individual honor was inextricably bound up with that of his regiment or corps. The regiments themselves had their own collective code of honor regarding their behavior in battle, and this played a most important role in determining the treatment of their members by the King. A regiment that once incurred his disfavor by disgracing itself long afterwards suffered from his displeasure. Promotion in its officers' corps would be suspended for long years, vacancies being filled not from the lower rank, but from outside, and the officers in their old age would find themselves excluded from pensions or the civilian posts, while the rank and file were similarly punished by being denied the benefits normally given to invalided veterans. In addition to these material disadvantages the regiments themselves were frequently "admonished" by being deprived of certain highly-coveted distinctions, such as the right to play the march of the *élite* units of the infantry, the "Grenadiers," or in extreme cases by being degraded to the status of a garrison regiment.

This acute sense of honor, both private and collective, which was to be the Prussian officer's lodestar and vital support was, in Frederick's opinion, not normally to be met with in men of bourgeois origin. The individual bourgeois, with his commercial traditions, was thought to be incapable of serving disinterestedly, of ignoring material advancement, or of sacrificing himself, if need be, for honor's sake; while the bourgeois class as a whole did not offer the King the same guarantees of a collective feeling of honor and solidarity as the nobility. If a bourgeois officer were passed out of the army, he could turn to ~~any other~~ occupation. A nobleman in the same predicament would find himself deprived of every possibility of existence, for his own family would disown him. Thus a bourgeois officer, as such, irrespective of his

personal qualities, in Frederick's eyes diminished the value of his army. Hence the otherwise incomprehensible obstinacy with which he set himself to preserve his officers, not only against any infiltration of non-noble elements into their ranks—he went so far as to have officers transferred to other inferior regiments, merely because doubts had arisen as to the genuineness of their claim to nobility—but from any contamination with the bourgeois class. The King was not only on principle opposed to marriages of his officers with ladies of bourgeois origin, however desirable, but even to any social intercourse between them and the bourgeoisie. If an officer, despite repeated warnings, would not desist from it, he should be dismissed from his regiment.

This intense cult of "honor" among the officers of Frederick's army served as the common bond uniting them amongst themselves and with their King and state, and also as a compensation for the many hardships of their profession. For despite his privileged position, the lot of the Prussian officer was by no means easy. Duty was hard and severe. Advancement was normally slow and pay very poor until on reaching the grade of captain he obtained a company of his own, which as a last remnant of the "condottiere" system of the seventeenth century still remained in the hands of the commander, not of the state. Yet even as a staff officer he was never out of danger of being sent "to the devil" without any provision, if he happened unfortunately to excite the King's displeasure at a review. Pensions and administrative posts given to officers upon their retirement were scarce, and were a mark of favor, not a right that could be claimed. The whole atmosphere was that of a rigid subordination of every other claim to the interests of the service and to the well-being of the order as a whole, to which the individual was inexorably sacrificed where necessary.

Frederick himself was not invariably lucky in his treatment of his officers. His relations with them had never been very warm. His cool, sarcastic, superior manner was apt to impose obedience rather than to evoke a warm human response from his subordinates, while his complex personality, his love of French civilization, and his secret disgust at the bloody work of war made him a strange, mysterious, incomprehensible figure in the eyes of most of them. In his youth his genuine friendship with some of the most brilliant of his officers had helped to bridge that gulf. But in the course of the Seven Years' War these friends fell, one after the other, and nobody arose to take their places. Thus, as that

struggle dragged on, Frederick grew more and more lonely, while round him in his own headquarters secret criticism, murmuring, and even mockery began to be heard.

For this disaffection, amidst all the devotion inspired by his heroic example, Frederick was not a little to blame. He had done much to create such feeling by the manner in which he stifled the spirit of responsibility and independence in his army and, above all, among his commanders. In theory, as in his instruction to his generals, Frederick emphasized the need for independent action, claiming that they were called "generals" because they were expected to take responsibility for anything to which they had given due consideration. In practice, however, he himself inclined to rate—with rare exceptions—blind compliance to his commands infinitely higher than intelligent initiative. The result was that his generals, when entrusted with an independent mission, were apt to follow anxiously the letters of his orders, thereby sometimes precipitating catastrophes that might otherwise have been avoided. As he admitted in his correspondence, at times everybody in his surroundings trembled at the mere words "independent command."

The almost superhuman burden of responsibility that he had to bear throughout these years, sometimes overtaxing even Frederick's strength, made him impatient and unjust towards the failings of his instruments, in particular when he himself was equally to blame. His habit of making a whole regiment or corps suffer for the mistakes of its commanders worked an injustice on many subordinate officers of irreproachable character and conduct. In time of peace the emphasis upon the strictest discipline or "subordination," as it was then called, inclined him to support almost invariably the superior officer against his subordinate without inquiring into the justice of the latter's case, so that he did not give subordinates the necessary protection against unjustifiable treatment at the hands of their commanders. Even the mere complaint of a subaltern was frowned upon as a threat to discipline. In this hard school the Prussian officer was taught—as one of his biographers expresses it—to seek his satisfaction solely in the execution of his duty; to renounce all personal advantage, all material gain, all comfort, even all desire, provided only that his service and his honor remained to him.

It was a harsh and narrow idea at its best and reality often fell short of it. That by far the greater part of the Prussian officers were deplorably ignorant, even according to the low standards

of that age, is perhaps not surprising in view of their largely mechanical functions, and of the fact that many of them joined the army at the early age of twelve. Frederick himself, although greatly concerned about the training of a small *élite* of high-class staff officers, did practically nothing to improve the general level of his officers. More remarkable is the fact that this extreme cult of honor and unselfish devotion did not exclude acts of corruption, which the finer feeling of succeeding generations felt to be utterly incompatible with it. When Frederick, after the Seven Years' War, abolished the system of leaving the foreign recruitment in the hands of the company commanders, many of the captains recouped themselves for the loss by falsifying the lists of soldiers actually in service. The moral integrity of the officers in other respects was not yet above reproach, nor their unity and cohesion anything like what it was to become during the nineteenth century.

Yet with all his undeniable limitations and shortcomings, the Prussian officer—and with him the Prussian official, and the Prussian State which rested upon these two—was to play an important role in the development of the German people. Without the stiffening which it received from that hardy type it is difficult to see how the German nation would have weathered the storms of the Napoleonic age or the internal troubles of the nineteenth century. It was exhausted Prussia, not the prosperous French satellites of South and Central Germany, from which the revolt against Napoleon's yoke took its course; it was Prussia again which, after more than half a century of abortive attempts, with the strength of its sword cut the Gordian knot and brought about the unification of the new "Reich."

Nor was the officer class without its own peculiar attraction. If the Prussian officer appeared hard and exacting towards others, he spared himself least, whether on the battlefield or in the daily routine. There was a greatness in this grim devotion to duty and nothing but duty that through generations attracted not the worst among the other Germans to devote their lives to the service of the state. No less profound was the response which that idea evoked in German literature and thought. Three of Germany's greatest thinkers, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, each in his own way, bore impressive testimony to its power. Lessing, whose manly outlook was the very personification of its spirit, gave Frederick's army its immortal monument in his *Minna von Barnhelm*, while out of its own ranks there arose in Heinrich

von Kleist, Germany's greatest dramatist with Schiller and Goethe, the poet who was to crystallize its innermost feeling in the classical lines of the *Prinz von Homburg*.

V

Frederick's latter years, despite his indefatigable vigilance, saw a gradual decline of his army, which became painfully apparent in the abortive War of Bavarian Succession (1778). With all his greatness as a commander, he had never been a military organizer like his father, and the desperate efforts made by him to restore his force to its former excellence merely served to aggravate the situation. We have touched above upon the extremes to which his attempts to restore the rigidly aristocratic character of his officers' corps led him. They resulted, contrary to his expectations, in such a decline in its efficiency that he ultimately realized the necessity of instilling new blood into its ranks by the promotion of suitable noncommissioned officers—though he did not get much beyond the intention. The excessive drill introduced after the Seven Years' War in order to re-establish discipline merely served to cramp the army's spirit and mobility, and the new system of delegating the control of the forces to special inspectors often junior in rank to the generals, whose regiments they were sent to inspect, caused much bad blood.

The main reasons for this decline, however, lay deeper than in any individual mistakes and measures. The whole carefully balanced system of his state, despite the remarkable ingenuity with which its various parts fitted into each other, was too artificial and too complicated to retain its full efficiency over any considerable length of time, even in the hands of a genius like Frederick. The rigid separation of the classes, each with its own peculiar sphere and function, fatally strangled the development of any public spirit. Only the King and the nobility felt themselves to be active partners, while the mass of the middle class and the peasantry remained mere objects of the paternal benevolence of the government. Above all, however, Frederick's profound distrust of his subordinates led him to an excessive concentration of all decisions in his hands that was to bring about the downfall of his system. All the devotion with which he strove to cope with this impossible task could not prevent the structure of his state from cracking. Under a weaker successor it was merely a question of time when it would break down altogether.

Chapter Two

THE ERA OF REFORM

I

With the death of Frederick the Great the disintegration of the complex and artificial structure of his state, which his tireless service and iron energy had kept at bay so long, set in with full force. His successors, his profligate and scatter-brained nephew Frederick William II and this nephew's son, the honest and well-intentioned but narrow and timid Frederick William III, inherited his position and power, but not his genius. They were unable to control the vast machinery which had been deliberately complicated by Frederick in order to insure his sole control and to enable him to play off one department against the other. Yet they clung, as weak men will, all the more persistently to the pretence of omnipotence, suggested and encouraged by irresponsible, and not always trustworthy, advisers, favorites, and mistresses. Frederick's rule had been hard and often tyrannical, but with all that, remarkably efficient and just. It gave way, after his death, to a far more easy-going treatment of affairs, outwardly far more benevolent and humane but lacking completely his ruthless energy, tireless watchfulness, and strict impartiality. Animated at the best by a narrow-minded and pedantic benevolence, this régime was incapable of facing a real crisis or arriving at a necessary decision.

Yet even under a better-organized and stronger leadership the Prussian state could hardly have hoped to maintain its power and prestige. The artificial segregation of the various sections of the community upon which it was based made any natural growth and the development of a real public life impossible. The aristocracy, deprived of its former political influence and compensated by paternal powers of command and jurisdiction on its estates, clung to its prerogatives and violently opposed the slightest attempt at any change. The middle class, much less developed in spirit and self-consciousness than in France or Great Britain, subservient, narrow and materialistic in its out-

look, did not aspire beyond the sphere which was allotted to it, that of making profits and amassing fortunes under the benevolent protection and administration of the absolute state.

The peasantry were protected against the worst abuses on the part of the aristocracy, but otherwise had been suppressed by it for centuries in a sort of semi-slavery. They were an uncouth, untaught, seething mass, which occasionally protested against its miserable state by local risings, but which was on the whole incapable of contributing anything to its advancement, or even of formulating and voicing its complaints and desires. The spirit of paternalistic despotism, controlling all these sections from above, stifled any initiative.

Only a complete reorganization of the whole state could have broken this spell or released the forces within it. Yet nothing was farther from the minds of its rulers than such a radical step. For in the last resort the structure of the Prussian state was determined by the structure of the Prussian Army, and the Army, although its defects could not well be overlooked, was still such an object of awe that the idea of its complete and fundamental reform from top to bottom appeared to be little short of sacrilege.

In fact there was no desire for such wholesale reform. In the absence of a strong and educated middle class, public opinion and public discussion, such as had moved and shaken French public life in the decades prior to the great revolution, had never developed. The great poets and philosophers on the other hand had looked on the whole with little sympathy upon the narrow rationalism and the military spirit of the Prussian state.

Thus in Prussia the whole task of criticism and of reform rested upon the shoulders of a small group of high officials, who in their work had gained an inkling of the weaknesses of the state. Yet the spirit of its traditions, which on the one hand drove them to urge reforms even against the King's disinclination, served at the same time to prevent them from realizing anything like the full extent of the damage or of the reforms needed to cope with it. They were so convinced of the fundamental soundness of the Prussian state, so proud of the spirit of justice and unselfish devotion which they saw represented in its traditions—of which they felt themselves not unworthy heirs—that the idea that something fundamental could be wrong with it never occurred to them.

The result was that such reforms as were undertaken at their instigation were but half-measures. By far the most important

in the field of civil reforms, the one great step achieved, was the freeing of the peasants from their traditional bondage on Crown estates. But only a very few of the great landholders voluntarily followed this example and the administration did not dare to press the matter further. In all other respects the reforms introduced in the twenty years between the death of Frederick (1786) and the breakdown of his state on the battlefields of Jena and Auerstadt (1806) were confined to the simplification and the humanizing of the existing forms of administration and revenue. The various kinds of local tolls were consolidated and reduced to a few essentials. The administration was simplified and the multiplication of organs and taxes reduced. A unified system of revenues was introduced so far as the scattered territories would allow it, and the strict division between the towns and the country mitigated.

Even less progress was made during these years in the organization of the army. Napoleon's greatness was not yet understood; his dazzling successes were explained by sheer luck, and other French generals, like Desaix and Moreau, were considered to be almost his equals. The lessons of his campaigns were not really taken to heart, despite endless discussion, and the only change suggested by them, the permanent organization of the army into self-contained divisions composed of all arms and capable of independent action, was not introduced until just before the critical conflict. This was too late to allow of their effective use, with the result that it served merely to confuse still further the antiquated and inadequate methods in the higher command which the Prussian Army had inherited from the Seven Years' War. The same, in fact, was unfortunately true of nearly all these well meant measures, both in the civilian and in the military sphere.

Unable to remove the real sources of weakness, these partial reforms served merely to hasten the disintegration of the Prussian state and still further to increase the general relaxation of the former rigid spirit and standards, which, with the death of Frederick, had begun in every sphere as a reaction to his iron rule. Released from his dreaded supervision, officials began to show signs of conceit and insubordination, while their integrity and impartiality did not remain unaffected by the general decline in moral standards. Under Frederick William II, Berlin became notorious as a center of moral laxity and sensual enjoyment; the number of illegitimate children of officials and officers rose to

an astonishing height, so that in 1800 Frederick William III had to issue an order that his officers should not live with mistresses. Although in this respect his reign brought some improvement, the general decline in discipline in the army did not cease. On the contrary, the well-intentioned measures by which the army authorities tried to improve the soldiers' lot—without achieving any fundamental improvement—only served to reduce its military efficiency still further.

If the Prussian state and army were thus in the first years of the nineteenth century riding for a fall, the stone over which they eventually stumbled came not, as in France, from within, but from without. The French Revolution, following almost immediately upon Frederick's death, had left the Prussian state less affected than any of the other great powers, with the exception of Russia. Frederick William II had helped to form the First Coalition in 1792, but as early as 1795 had retired from the struggle and made his private peace with the French Republic at Basel. Thus for more than a decade Prussia kept herself and the whole of the German Empire north of the Main out of the struggle which swept backwards and forwards across Southern Germany. But it was a neutrality of weakness and not of strength, as was shown when the growing power of Napoleon, coming nearer and nearer, imposed upon Prussia the necessity of abandoning her isolation and throwing in her lot on one side or the other.

The vacillating indecision and pusillanimity which the Prussian Government displayed in the face of this crisis not only deprived it of the last remnants of its former prestige but resulted in its practical isolation. Incensed by Napoleon's open violation of the neutrality of his South German territories in his encircling movement against the Austrian army at Ulm, Frederick William III undertook to join the Austro-Russian coalition unless his mediation with Napoleon should unexpectedly prove successful. But the despatch of his envoy was so long deferred that, before he could lay his proposals before Napoleon, the combined Russo-Austrians had rashly presented the latter with the opportunity of breaking their resistance at Austerlitz. In these circumstances the Prussian plenipotentiary was inveigled by Napoleon into signing an agreement by which Prussia received alliance and the loss of her South German territories, and thereby alienated both Great Britain and the two eastern powers, and from him Hanover in exchange for an offensive and defensive delivered Prussia, bound hand and foot, into Napoleon's hands.

When nine months later the Prussian Government, goaded to desperation by the contempt with which Napoleon repeatedly offered the return of Hanover to the British Government, made another *volte face* and declared war on Napoleon, she found herself practically alone, at war with Great Britain and Sweden, while Russia, the only great power upon whose help she could count, was too far away to be of any use in meeting the first onslaught.

Nor did the Prussian command realize the necessity even of concentrating all forces at its disposal. The Russians were given no directions to bring them as soon as possible to the main theater of war. The smaller North German principalities who had joined Prussia were allowed to retain their forces for the protection of their own territories, and most astonishing of all, a considerable part of Prussia's own troops, the forces stationed in Eastern Prussia and some formerly Polish territories, were exempted from the general mobilization. Instead of opposing Napoleon with an army almost double his strength, all that the Prussian commanders were able to mobilize were 128,000 men—and these, although not lacking in courage, were greatly inferior in tactical skill and experience to Napoleon's veterans.

Still more fatal was the pandemonium of indecision and conflicting counsels that reigned in the Prussian headquarters. The command was divided between the King and two commanders with their respective chiefs of staff, with the result that even the few sound plans produced in this confusion of wills and ideas had no practical result, and the Prussian Army sat undecided in its positions behind the Saale and waited for Napoleon to strike the fatal blow.

A defeat in these circumstances was almost inevitable. What caused the greatest surprise both to friend and to foe was the complete collapse of the Prussian Army after the brave and bloody fight which it had put up on the battlefields of Jena and Auerstadt. The main body, reduced by two weeks of relentless pursuit and the lack of all necessities to not more than 10,000 men, capitulated in the open field near Prenzlau, in sight of safety. The strongholds of the Prussian state fell, one after the other, without resistance, handed over by their weak and incompetent commanders; only a few of the smallest, Kolberg in Pomerania, Graudenz on the Vistula, Glatz and Kosel in Silesia, upheld the honor of the Prussian Army, although they were too weak to affect the course of operations. General Blücher with a small

corps fought his way through half Prussia right up to the Danish border at Lübeck, but he in turn was forced to surrender after having exhausted his provisions and munitions.

The rest of the war, after this catastrophic beginning, could only postpone the inevitable end. The Russians, arriving at last, were unable to hold their own against Napoleon, and having warded off his first attack in the undecided battle of Preussisch Eylau—largely thanks to the small remnant of the Prussian Army still in the field—succumbed a few months later at Friedland. On July 9th Frederick William III, driven into the last corner of his state, and deserted by his ally, Alexander of Russia, had to sign the harsh conditions of the Treaty of Tilsit. By it he lost the greater part of his estate, all territories west of the Elbe and most of his Polish possessions, retaining only a rump with four and a half million inhabitants.

At one blow Prussia had been reduced to the rank of a second-rate power, not much larger in territory and population than the possessions which Frederick the Great inherited from his father. Yet this was not the worst. Napoleon, who had shown to the Prussian dynasty and state a hatred which was unusual with him, except when his arch enemy England was concerned, gave it no chance of restoring its forces and attempting a revenge. The war indemnity, which Prussia had undertaken to pay without fixing the final amount, enabled him to bleed the unfortunate country white, while allowing him to maintain at its cost—as long as the whole sum had not been paid—an army of occupation of 150,000 men and 50,000 horses. Its exactions completed Prussia's financial, military, and political ruin.

What the Prussian state was able to achieve under these almost intolerable conditions during the six short years between the signing of the Treaty of Tilsit and the beginning of the wars of liberation in the spring of 1813 must rank as perhaps the proudest page in its history and a memorable triumph of the spirit over all material obstacles as well as human malice and indolence. For this relentless oppression on the part of the enemy was but one of the almost insuperable difficulties which the work of the re-establishment had to contend with. Although the extortions of the foreigner fell with equal force upon all sections

II

of the population, the resentment was by no means equally acute or widespread. The divisions between the various sections of the

community, although gradually breaking down under a common oppression, still made their fatal influence felt. The middle class was treated as equals by the French and South German officers of Napoleon's forces, most of them themselves of bourgeois origin, and was admitted on the same terms as the aristocracy to all social functions, even to the balls given by Napoleon's brother Jerome. The result was that many of its members forgot the distress of their country in rejoicing at the downfall of their overbearing and hated superiors. The intelligentsia, particularly in Berlin, always a hotbed of subversive criticism, fawned upon their conquerors. The attitude of large sections of the aristocracy was no better, though it had not the excuses of the middle class. Lack of character and insight, a narrow and selfish clinging to their private interests, led many of them to prefer the yoke of the invader to the revolutionary efforts of the reformers. In Upper Silesia, the center of aristocratic reaction, the great landowners required the help of the French forces of occupation to drive their despairing peasants to their tasks. In Berlin—and elsewhere—aristocratic circles vied with the intelligentsia in abject prostration before the victors and intrigued against the activities of the patriots. Even those who shared the feeling of shame and resentment at their country's fall were not inclined to sacrifice any part of their interests and prerogatives to the work of recovery. The great task of the social and economic liberation of the peasants had to be carried through in the teeth of the violent opposition of almost the whole landowning aristocracy and its partial success had to be bought by pernicious concessions of their economic interests.

Frederick William himself, although deeply resenting the injury and insult he and his state suffered at the hands of the conqueror, was the last man to lead such a wholesale reorganization or to give it his steady and full support. He was undecided and timid, distrustful of his own capacities and of the loyalty and the moral energies of his peoples. Incapable of any great sentiment or enthusiasm, and therefore equally incapable of understanding the feeling of national pride and resentment, the fervor and unselfish devotion of the patriots, he was suspicious of their revolutionary tendencies. Animated throughout by the narrow dynastic desire to preserve the heritage of his house he was unwilling to expose what was left of it to any further risk. In face of the intrigues and insinuations of the representatives of the old order and of the pro-French faction at court and in the

bureaucracy, the champions of the national restoration had constantly to exert pressure upon him in order to obtain grudging permission to carry on their work or half-hearted assent to their plans.

Amidst this apathy, treachery, and oppression, a small band of soldiers and civil administrators, backed by a sprinkling of patriotic individuals and societies from all sections of the community, carried the hesitating King with them, defying the opposition of the representatives of the old order and deceiving Napoleon's spies. They strove desperately to lay the foundations for the restoration of Prussia to a position that would enable her to enter once more the political arena in arms against her oppressor.

At their head during the decisive first year and a half was Baron vom Stein, a man who in that struggle was to grow into one of the greatest statesmen Prussian and German history has known. The scion of an old imperial barony on the banks of the Lahn and Middle Rhine, he had early entered the Prussian service and had had a distinguished career as administrator of the outlying Westphalian and Rhenish territories, and later as Minister of Economics and Finance in the General Directory. In the latter position he had, during the year preceding the final catastrophe, gradually become the leader of the opposition, in which princes of the royal family, high generals and officials in vain united at the last moment to convince the King of the need both for indispensable reforms internally and for a stronger attitude in foreign policy. Having accompanied the court in its flight to Königsberg, he had been dismissed in January 1807 by Frederick William in disgrace as a "recalcitrant, truculent, obstinate, and insubordinate servant" for his insistence upon the abolition of autocratic rule and irresponsible cabinet-councillors and the establishment of a joint and independent council of ministers. Yet within barely six months the King saw himself forced to recall Stein to the new position of principal adviser as the only man able to cope with the appalling tasks that had to be faced. It was the personal tragedy of Stein, and with him of the whole work of reform, that with his tremendous moral force and remarkable powers both as a statesman and an administrator, he did not combine an equal ability as a politician and a diplomatist. The clearness and honesty of his convictions, which he was incapable of adapting to the exigencies of the situation; his lack of personal ambition and of the true politician's instinct

tive craving for power for power's sake alone, which made him insensible to the intrigues of colleagues and rivals; the idealistic enthusiasm which was apt to lead him into impetuosity—all these were weaknesses in the struggle for maintaining himself in the dangerous game of countering Napoleon's treacherous policy, although they made him, on the other hand, the pre-destined restorer of the moral bases of the state. His conviction that it was the state's duty to educate its citizens to be independent and responsible moral beings gave the work of reform its driving force. That conviction was born not so much of abstract general principles as of his practical experiences as an administrator, his sound common sense, and a somewhat romantic admiration for the last remnants of the medieval "liberties" of the estates in the Rhenish and Westphalian territories of Prussia with which he had had to deal during his service there. The result was that he was never misled into doctrinaire excesses of pure Kantian ethics, like some of his closest and most prominent collaborators.

Among his collaborators none could compare with Stein. Out of the whole circle of his friends and supporters only the two soldiers, Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, achieved in their own sphere the same greatness.

Scharnhorst, the head of the military reforms, was in many respects the opposite of Stein. The son of a small peasant land-owner in Hanover, he owed his remarkable career exclusively to his own efforts, his exceptional intellectual powers, the greatness of his character which combined strong passions with sensitiveness and melancholy, the energy with which he fought his strenuous way upwards and gradually achieved recognition and preferment. After an excellent training at the Prince of Lippe's famous military academy on the Wilhelmstein, Scharnhorst began his career in the Hanoverian Army. In this most exclusively aristocratic of all German principalities he found his origin a handicap which neither the high reputation he rapidly acquired as a military writer and teacher nor the exceptional proofs of his soldierly qualities which he gave during the campaigns of 1793-4 in Flanders against the armies of the French Revolution, could overcome effectively. "We are being set back in favor of the aristocrats and yet we fight for them... the silliest ass gets on almost as well as the most intelligent," he wrote at that time in bitter desperation.

In these circumstances it was only natural that he should at last accept the repeated offers made to him on the part of Fred-

erick William to join the Prussian Army in July 1801 with the rank of lieutenant colonel and a patent of nobility. The impression which he made upon the Prussian officers was at first anything but favorable. His unmilitary appearance and awkward bearing, which was that of a professor rather than of a soldier, contrasted so strangely with the military smartness aimed at in Prussia that all but a few were inclined to dismiss him as a mere bookworm. One of them went so far as to claim that he knew not a single noncommissioned officer in the force who was not Scharnhorst's superior in military matters. Nor was he able to set off these defects by brilliant reasoning or writing. His speech, as the most intimate and devoted of his pupils, Clausewitz, tells us, was singularly unimpressive. Incapable of finding the right expression he tried to convey his meaning by repeating the same ideas again and again from different angles, a method which, although successful in the end, was not apt to assist him in the difficult task of asserting himself against the many glib and superficial military theorists who infested the Prussian Army at that time. The same struggle in formulating his thoughts runs through his writings and, above all, his letters, giving them a peculiar charm of their own. Yet behind these inadequacies of expression there was a brain of unusual strength and penetration, that of one of the greatest military thinkers of all ages who had already guessed the riddle of Napoleon's miraculous success, and gained an inkling of the magnitude of the change brought about in warfare by the Revolution and its heir and successor.

It was in the emphasis upon this change and upon the need of adapting to it the out-of-date military system and strategy of the Prussian Army that the chief work of Scharnhorst during the following years was to consist. As soon as he arrived in Prussia and while he was employed as an artillery specialist, he immediately faced the central issue by urging the incorporation of the artillery into a new army organization divided into independent divisions composed of all arms. At the same time he brought into being a "Military Society" under the presidency of General Rüchel, inspector of the guards and governor of Potsdam, which provided him with a platform on which to expound his revolutionary proposals: the distribution of the forces into divisions, the deployment of troops for battle in depth rather than in breadth, and the combination of the traditional Prussian line tactics with the more elastic new French system of swarms of sharpshooters, "tirailleurs." Within six months he was attached

to the then Chief of the General Staff, General von Geusau, and entrusted with the reorganization of the military school at Berlin. In this school, which he greatly expanded and supplemented by superimposing upon the more elementary "Institute" and "Academy" where strategy proper was taught, Scharnhorst found his real sphere of activity. While his suggestions for reform failed to win approval with the exception of the reorganization of the army into divisions—introduced, as we have seen above, too late—the young officers trained and inspired by him in the new strategy, Grolman and Boyen, Tiedemann and Rühle, and particularly his spiritual son and heir, Clausewitz, were to become his future helpers in the work of reform and the leading spirits of the Prussian Army in the war of liberation.

Unfortunately, when at last the opportunity came to test these new ideas against the man who by his deeds had inspired them, Scharnhorst found himself in the most galling position conceivable as chief of staff to the commander-in-chief, the Duke of Brunswick, near enough to the center of action to share to a considerable extent the responsibility and realize—better than anybody else—the issues crying for a decision, and yet powerless to bring about any clear course of action, far less to make his suggestion of concentrated action against the enemy's centers of mobilization in Northern Bavaria prevail in the confused debates that preceded the catastrophe. "What ought to be done I know only too well, what is going to be done, *only the gods know*," he wrote to his daughter a week before Jena and Auerstadt. The result of his insistence was merely that on the day of battle he was sent by the irritated Duke half in disgrace from the central direction to the left wing. There, taking over the command, he managed for a moment to maintain the fate of the day in the balance; but the reserves needed to achieve victory were held back and the retreat became inevitable. Having given his horse to Prince Heinrich, whom he met on the way, wounded, a rifle in his hand, Scharnhorst left the battlefield on foot with the last stragglers. With Blücher, whom he joined in this retreat, he shared the dangers and responsibilities of the march to Lübeck. When he was surprised there in his rooms by the French cavalry, Blücher, deprived of his advice, was forced to capitulate. He was exchanged and sent by Blücher with the report of his capitulation to the King and attached as adviser to Field Marshal L'Estocq, the commander of the last remnant of the Prussian army. In a hopeless struggle with the tired and incompetent

L'Estocq, Scharnhorst ate out his heart, but at the critical moment brought a part of the troops to the battlefield of Preussisch Eylau and deprived Napoleon of an almost certain victory.

After Tilsit, although only just promoted to major general, he was undoubtedly the first officer in the army. On July 25, 1807, the King entrusted him with the direction of the new commission created by him to effect the reorganization and reform of the army, the *Militär-Reorganizations-Kommission* which at last provided Scharnhorst with the means of putting some of his ideas into practice. Not that the King, despite the many signs of his favor, was yet inclined to give Scharnhorst's genius for organization a free hand. On the contrary, true to his persistent tendency to balance the representatives of one tendency in his advisers by those of the opposite complexion, Frederick William packed the commission with a majority of nonentities and opponents of Scharnhorst's policy. Stein had insisted upon becoming a member of the commission as a sign of his interest, but found practically no time to devote to it. Besides him there was only one member upon whom Scharnhorst could count in the beginning; but that one supporter was in himself worth a whole host of others: Gneisenau.

Gneisenau, the second head of the military reform next to Scharnhorst, differed as profoundly from him in personality as he resembled him in character and in fundamental convictions, his hatred of Napoleon and his faith in the resurrection of Prussia. He formed the ideal complement of his chief. A great, impressive, martial figure, the very prototype of a warrior hero, drawing all eyes upon himself by his majestic bearing, his exuberant spirit, he was essentially a man of action rather than of the pen. In the open field, where his enthusiasm and energy, his quickness in seizing the fleeting opportunity, the daring of his plans and actions, were able to assert themselves, he was in his element. Yet although he lacked diplomatic qualities, the unlimited capacity for self-effacement and the silent, tenacious energy by which alone Scharnhorst throughout the vicissitudes and defeats of the following years somehow succeeded in maintaining his grip upon the sources of power and of preserving his work from destruction, Gneisenau was anything but a mere dashing soldier like Blücher. Carefully brought up by his grandparents and trained in the Jesuit school at Würzburg and the University of Erfurt, he combined an unusually well-trained and brilliant intellect with an emotional and poetic temperament. A visit to America

with the contingent of Ansbach-Bayreuth, sent there towards the end of the War of Independence, although it did not provide him with the desired practical experience in the field, had served still further to enlarge his field of vision beyond that even of the well-educated officers of his day. On his return he entered the Prussian service like Stein and Scharnhorst, but was disappointed to find himself posted to a provincial regiment in a small Silesian garrison. There, having married into the local nobility, he lived for twenty years the dreary routine existence of a regimental officer. Later as captain of his company and administrator of his wife's estate, he studied eagerly the news of Napoleon's victories of Ulm and Austerlitz. To all appearance he was resigned to his fate.

When at last in the dark days following Jena the opportunity came, the real man suddenly asserted himself with elementary violence. Out of the general disorder that followed the defeat, his cool composure and the clearness of his arrangements stood out so conspicuously that he was immediately entrusted with greater tasks, and in the following spring was sent out to take over the command of one of the few points which still held out behind Napoleon's lines, the little fortress of Kolberg on the sea coast of Pomerania. His brilliant defence of that place until the armistice, against the determined assaults of a greatly superior force, militarily without significance, had been a moral success of the greatest importance, both as a vindication of the honor of the Prussian arms and as a cheering example for the patriots. It won for him a unique popularity throughout the country, which made his support of particular value at this moment.

In the following months Scharnhorst's party was to gain definitely the upper hand in the *Reorganizations Kommission* by the replacement—through the efforts of Stein—of several of his opponents by three younger officers who had equally distinguished themselves in the war, Lieutenant Colonel Count Götzen, the defender of Silesia, who, however, soon left the *Kommission* again to take over the secret military command of that province; and the two majors, Grolman and Boyen, both of them former pupils of Scharnhorst at the Military Academy. With them was the devoted Clausewitz. As *aide de camp* to Prince August of Prussia he had had the misfortune to be taken prisoner and sent to France with his prince, but in April 1808 he was able to return to the provisional seat of the administration at Königsberg, where he was soon reclaimed by Scharnhorst as his per-

sonal "chef de bureau" and publicity agent. They formed with Gneisenau and Scharnhorst the inner circle of "the Reformers."

What bound these men—differing so profoundly in origin and tradition, in training and outlook—into the intimate community of a "band of brothers," and gave this age of reform its unique character in the history of the German army and the German people, was the greatness and the nobility of spirit in which they took up their task. Rarely in the history of mankind have the concrete issues of the day been approached and attacked with such deep feeling for the human factors involved. The immediate task before them was the reconstruction and the reorganization of a defeated army. If the King and those sharing his views had had their way, it would have remained a purely technical, administrative patchwork: the bringing together of the remnants of regiments, the redistribution of their "cantons," broken up by the dismemberment of the state; a few hesitating and half-hearted concessions to the "demands of the age" in the admission of a larger percentage of bourgeois elements to the officers' ranks and, above all, an extensive rearrangement of scales of pay and redesign of uniforms. In the hands of Scharnhorst and his followers the work of reform acquired true significance and grew into something infinitely greater than a mere technical reorganization: the awakening of the spirit of a nation and the rebuilding of a state.

Despite the harmony of thought and action, of idealistic impulse and cool appreciation of the dangers and difficulties of their position, of the statesman's outlook and the soldier's daring which characterized them, their success was short-lived and incomplete. The very intensity and singlemindedness of their effort aroused against them the anger and hatred of all those who, fearing for their privileges, poisoned the King's mind with warnings against their hot-headed "Jacobinism." For although confident of the Reformer's motives and fidelity, the King resented continuously being pushed to heroic extremes, from which both his natural indecision and his prudence caused him to shrink. Overestimating in their enthusiasm the strength of the moral response which they had aroused, overestimating the Prussian state's capacity to abandon its fundamental traditions, they tried in vain to carry through a policy of radical reconstruction for which neither the King nor the country were prepared.

Although they paid dearly for these and other errors, and for a time appeared to have lost the game altogether, without their

unrealistic enthusiasm the ultimate resurrection of Prussia could never have been brought about. For it was only by aiming at the unachievable that they were able to keep the spirit of independence and heroic revolt alive amidst the general defeatist depression, and to obtain from the King and his opportunist advisers a minimum of practical preparation, without which the military improvisation of 1813 would have been impossible.

III

In Scharnhorst's opinion the French had emerged victorious from the attacks launched from all sides against the Revolution "because they were able to conduct the war with the resources of the whole nation and in the last resort to sacrifice literally everything to the continuation of the struggle." Only by a similar mobilization of the patriotic fervor and the moral energies of the whole population could Prussia hope to make good the fearful material losses which it had suffered—and was still suffering—and regain a position in which she might hope to reassert her independence.

If the Prussian reformers were in this way taking a leaf out of the book of the Revolution so as to meet its heir with his own weapons, their aims and their motives differed profoundly from those of their great prototype and enemy.

In France an elementary political urge had broken its way with unprecedented violence through all the existing forms and fetters, combining base and noble passions, blood lust, revenge, cruelty, cupidity with high-minded enthusiasm, sacrifice, and devotion. It had risen like an irresistible torrent at the call of its leaders to sweep away the threat to its new-won liberties.

In Prussia, on the other hand, the reform coming from above, not from below, found no political consciousness to which it could appeal, and had first to arouse in the middle classes as well as in the peasants and laborers that public spirit and national feeling that would identify its fate with that of its country. Even if it had not been necessary to be careful about the monarch's rights and prerogatives, the reformers hardly considered the problem of achieving this political mobilization of subjects into citizens by granting them some form of political expression. The vague project of some form of deliberative assembly played but an insignificant role in their plans. What they were concerned with was something much more narrow and elementary: to liberate the individual in the various walks of life from the fetters

imposed upon him by the artificial structure of Frederick's state and to offer in local self-administration a limited field for the development of initiative and responsibility. Their ideal might have been described as a "liberal absolutism," reserving the power of political decision to the King and his advisers, but seeking on the other hand to promote as far as possible the spirit of spontaneous initiative and goodwill, of moral independence, of responsibility and of national consciousness amongst the citizens.

With the qualifications inevitable in all such sweeping generalizations, one might, therefore, say that the appeal of the Prussian reformers was directed not to the *political* freedom of man, as in the French Revolution, but to his inner, *moral* freedom as an intelligent and responsible person. As a "morally free and independent man" the individual was expected to take upon himself the cause and defense of his country—if need be by the sacrifice of his life—as an act of his own free will. He should do this not merely as the result of external compulsion, nor in exchange for political rights conferred upon him, but as the simple and unconditional duty of every member of the community. If today this separation of moral from political freedom seems to contain an inner contradiction that was to vitiate the whole subsequent course of Prusso-German history, we should not forget that in this concentration upon the "inner" rather than the "outward" freedom of man the reformers were in agreement with the whole spirit of German idealistic thought in that, its greatest age. That man should be respected and protected in his fundamental human dignity appeared to them a self-evident moral necessity, independent of the immediate practical objectives of their endeavors. But such recognition and protection by no means implied the necessity of granting him political rights for which he was obviously unprepared.

On the other hand, such an appeal to the moral personality of every citizen presupposed at the least that he should enjoy personal freedom. The state of semi-serfdom in which the larger part of the Prussian peasantry still lived was incompatible with the reformers' ideals and with their practical objectives. The personal emancipation of the peasantry, therefore, formed the corner-stone of all Stein's efforts, although his own share in it was actually less than in the administrative reforms of the central government or in the introduction of municipal self-government—the only field in which the reformers achieved full and unqualified success. In the same way we find Scharnhorst

and his collaborators subordinating all other endeavors to the central issue of transforming military service from a despised occupation reserved to foreign mercenaries and the "lower orders" into the highest honor of every citizen.

Such transformation found its symbolical expression in the substitution, at Stein's suggestion, of "King and Nation" for the "Warlord" of mercenary tradition in the soldiers' oath. It required the abolition of foreign recruitment and particularly of the cruel system of corporal punishment by which discipline had hitherto been maintained in the Prussian Army. The fundamental importance of this was at first not even perceived by Stein, who expressed himself in favor of the continuation of a limited system of corporal punishment. But here was a point on which Scharnhorst and his friends were not willing to concede an inch. In their deep sense of the moral dignity of the individual, they realized that it was impossible to appeal to the sense of honor and national feeling in a man as long as his back was not yet safe from the corporal's rod. After a hard struggle they won a complete victory on this point—the only one they ever achieved.

The foundations had thus been laid for general conscription, but Scharnhorst was far from ready to suggest its introduction. The degradation of the soldier had impressed itself too deeply on the mind of the population. The atmosphere of the standing army had been too long poisoned by the brutality with which its discipline had been enforced to make it possible for the middle class to give its sons willingly. On the other hand, small as the numbers of the bourgeoisie were in comparison with the mass of the population, Scharnhorst was violently opposed to following Napoleon's example and, under the appearance of universal conscription, exempt them in practice. The moral impulse of the idea of universal obligation to serve would have been fatally weakened by any infraction of the principle. Moreover he saw in the sons of well-to-do, educated families a means of raising the moral and intellectual level of his forces by which he hoped to offset the enemy's numerical superiority. As a way out of this dilemma he hit upon the plan of supplementing the regular army, in which all citizens from 18 to 30 years of age who could not equip and maintain themselves were to be trained, by a "reserve army," later rechristened "provincial forces," composed of those able to equip, maintain, and train themselves at their own expense. In this way, he hoped that instead of having to wait until the first reservists would have passed through the

regular army, it would be possible to raise immediately a considerable reserve force without any additional expense to the state and without arousing the enemy's suspicion. To emphasize the fundamental equality of this form of national militia with the standing forces, Scharnhorst proposed that it should be organized in every respect on the same lines, and that its officers, elected from its midst, should have the same standing as those of the regular forces.

Unfortunately, before Scharnhorst could think of proceeding to the realization of these plans, a singularly incautious act on the part of Stein not only brought about his own downfall, but shook the whole work of the reform. With incredible carelessness Stein had written about his hopes and plans for an insurrection against Napoleon's rule in Western Germany in letters sent by him through a trustworthy courier to some of his confidants in French territory. These letters, intercepted by the French authorities, were suddenly presented by Napoleon to the Prussian envoys negotiating with him in Paris for a reduction of his exorbitant war indemnity claims and were used to enforce not only the acceptance of all his demands, but the dismissal of Stein who was outlawed as an enemy of France and forced to fly to Prague in Austrian territory.

With the fall of Stein the reform lost its head and heart. Under the weak ministry that followed him, the civil side of the reform stopped almost completely, and when from 1810 onwards it was gradually taken up again by the cautious opportunist, Hardenberg, it was with much more restricted objectives and without the single-minded enthusiasm and the moral energy of Stein. As for the military reformers, their work was hardly less affected. It needed all Scharnhorst's quiet diplomacy to maintain himself in the King's favor and escape Stein's fate, but the foundations upon which he had hoped to rebuild the military power of his country had been shattered.

By the Paris Treaty, which Napoleon had been able to impose upon Prussia as a result of Stein's mistake, her army was definitely fixed at a maximum of 42,000 effectives, with the distribution of this number between the various arms rigidly determined, and most important of all, any form of national militia besides the standing army strictly forbidden. In these circumstances the only way left to the reformers for increasing the forces of their country beyond these numbers was by the training of short-term reservists within the standing army. Although Frederick William

had given his assent to the proclamation of the principle of universal conscription, he could not be induced to make it effective. All that the reformers could obtain from him was the permission to draft a small number of recruits per company, and replace them by others after a minimum of training. In that manner it was possible to build up between 1808 and 1813 a reserve of something like 36,000 trained men behind the official allowed front-line strength actually under colors, but not to mobilize the whole manpower of the nation, as Scharnhorst and his friends had wished.

No less hard, but more successful in the end, were their struggles in the second main issue of the reform, the reorganization of the officers' corps. The new idea of the army as the "nation in arms" demanded the abolition of the obsolete system by which the officers' ranks had hitherto been practically reserved for the aristocracy. Where every citizen was called upon in the name of honor to risk his life in the defense of his King and country, the claims to a special sense of honor could no longer form the exclusive prerogative of a single class. Leadership had to be equally accessible to all. As Scharnhorst pointed out in one of his most impassioned memoranda, restriction in this respect meant that the state voluntarily deprived itself of all the military talent to be found in the great mass of its citizens. Henceforth merit and not birth alone should give access to the officers' ranks, just as merit and not seniority should govern promotion within them.

Moreover, the greatly increased flexibility of tactics made far higher demands upon the officer's initiative and training than the elementary virtues of leadership demanded from him in Frederick the Great's days. By making the promotion to a commission dependent both upon the passing of an examination and the subsequent election by the officers of the unit in question, Scharnhorst provided for the exigencies of the new time, and also maintained the fundamental aristocratic character of the Prussian officers' corps as a close corporation based upon its own peculiar spirit and sense of honor. To strengthen and preserve that corporate spirit under the stress of so fundamental an expansion of its social basis, special courts of honor were instituted in which the officers themselves could watch over the maintenance of their traditions.

For the professional training of the future officers, three military schools for ensigns were created, at Berlin, Königsberg and Breslau, and for the instruction in staff work and the higher

aspects of the art of war the former Military Academy was reconstituted as the "Military School for Officers" which, under the name of "War Academy" was to become one of the most famous institutions of the Prussian Army. There, in its highest course, Scharnhorst trained his future general staff for the coming struggle.

To crown these and many other more technical activities, Scharnhorst had the profound satisfaction of seeing his old plea for a central co-ordination of all military affairs, command, administration, general staff, and personnel, fulfilled by the creation in March 1809 of a Ministry of War. Once again indeed the King's predilection for half-measures showed itself in leaving the position of Minister of War vacant and officially making Scharnhorst merely head of the General Department with an old enemy as Chief of the Administrative Section. But in practice Scharnhorst represented the Ministry in the Council of Ministers and performed the functions of a minister.

The creation of the Ministry of War was the last great success which the reformers achieved. Their efforts to push the King into joining Austria in her revolt against Napoleon in 1809 had ended in arousing his severe displeasure, while treacherous denunciations began to direct the attention of Napoleon and his servants to their activities. One reformer after the other went, or was forced to go. First, in the spring of 1809, Grolman, after joining the Austrians, went on to the Peninsula to carry on his fight against Napoleon in Wellington's army. Then Gneisenau, relieved shortly afterwards of his post at Napoleon's instigation, was sent on a diplomatic mission to London. Finally, a year later, Scharnhorst himself had to ask the King to relieve him of his post at the head of the General Department of War to forestall a French demand for his dismissal. He still retained his other functions as Chief of the General Staff and Inspector General of Fortifications and by a secret order his successor was instructed not to undertake any important step without his knowledge, but this provision soon became a dead letter and his influence began rapidly to wane.

Once more, in 1811, the hopes of the patriots ran high when the imminent clash between Napoleon and Alexander of Russia forced the Prussian state to decide its attitude towards that conflict in which it could not hope to keep neutral, even if it wished. Against their passionate entreaties to resist Napoleon's demands, Frederick William decided in favor of the French alliance, which

required him to place half of his small force at Napoleon's disposition for the march to Moscow. A number of officers thereupon left the Prussian service and about thirty, amongst them Clausewitz, actually joined the Russian Army, a step which the King neither understood nor ever forgave. Scharnhorst, fully sharing his friends' feelings and appreciating their motives, refused to follow them. He gave up the command of the general staff and retired to Silesia. With the catastrophe of the "Grande Armée" his hour had come again. In the spring of 1813 he met the King in Breslau, was reappointed head of the Military Department, and organized the Prussian revolt against Napoleon.

That organization was one of the most remarkable triumphs of the will in history. The standing army was mobilized and its numbers were raised by incorporation of the reservists from 56,000 to nearly 100,000 men. This was followed by the mobilization on the spur of the moment of the whole untrained manpower of the country between 17 and 40 years of age through the famous "Landwehr Edict" of March 17. Everything was lacking, money, arms, equipment; the front rank of the "Landwehr" infantry and the whole "Landwehr" cavalry had at first to be armed with pikes. But with the help of the many officers maintained since 1801 on half-pay, these raw levies were so far drilled into shape that the Prussian Army, which had begun its spring campaign with a total strength of 135,000, after the summer armistice was able to take the field again with the imposing total of 279,000 men, later raised to 300,000, six per cent of the total population.

The man responsible for this was the first to drink the bitter cup that was to be the fate of almost all the reformers. "With all this," he writes to his daughter in the midst of the work of the reorganization, "I have been unable to acquire any command for myself; I have had to be satisfied with installing good, useful men; I could only achieve this by renouncing everything for myself." Promoted to lieutenant general he had to be satisfied with the post of chief of staff to Blücher commanding the Prussian contingent co-operating with the Russian field army. Powerless to gain any real influence upon the direction of the operations, he threw himself into battle at the head of his staff at Gross Goerschen, and was wounded in the foot by a bullet. Disregarding this wound he set out during the armistice to Vienna, to secure Austria's adhesion to the Russo-Prussian alliance, but his wound suddenly got worse and he was forced first to stop at the

little Bohemian town of Znaim and then to return to Prague, where he died a few days later. During those days in Znaim he for once revealed his innermost thought in a letter to his daughter:

"I want nothing from the world; what I desire she does not give me anyhow; provided that I can soon get about again unwounded, I shall somehow be able to settle things.

"A certain post is destined for me, as soon as I am well again, a curious one. That does not trouble me, however. If I were given supreme command I would care much for it, for I believe myself in all respects fully capable of it. As that is impossible, everything else is indifferent to me; in the fight I shall anyhow soon find a position where I can command alone, because my rank and my position will allow me to assume it and because in such moments acts of that kind are not opposed. Distinctions mean nothing to me; as I do not receive what I deserve, everything else is an insult to me and I would despise myself if I thought otherwise. All my seven orders and my life I would give for the command of a single day. It may seem strange to you that what I write here is so contrary to my (usual) nature, that I have not desired anything, never shown myself dissatisfied, and now write so differently to you. This is, however, no ordinary letter, but a message to you showing how your father thought (in his heart) when I shall one day no longer be alive, and you will realize that you have not judged me rightly. As you will see I have paid no heed to opinion and acted solely according to what I held to be right and suitable to me."

Chapter Three

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

I

After the great drama of the rise of Prussia under Frederick the Great and of the struggle of the Prussian reformers against Napoleon, German history in the first half of the nineteenth century is at first sight uninspiring and bewildering with its confusing multiplicity of nearly thirty independent states, each with its own particular political life, its thousand cross-currents, and its hopeless provincialism. Yet it was in this confused and unreal atmosphere of the sublime and the ridiculous that the great issue of the emancipation of the German nation from the political control of its princes was raised and temporarily decided with results that have determined the subsequent development of German history to the present day.

The wars of Napoleon had roused the German nation out of the political lethargy in which it had lain since the Thirty Years' War. In the south and west, French rule or the alliance with France in the Rhine League had spread the ideas of the French Revolution among the people and particularly the rising middle class. In Prussia the Government had striven to rouse its subjects out of their political indifference to conscious citizenship so as to mobilize their patriotic enthusiasm against Napoleon. We have seen how narrowly circumscribed the aim of the reformers had been in its appeal to the "moral forces" of the nation. But like all such appeals theirs inevitably called into life tendencies that went far beyond the intention of its authors. The masses indeed only too soon sank back again into their former indifference. But in the middle class the dreams of national unity and political liberty, which the struggle against Napoleon had roused, did not die down even where, as in Prussia, the political life of the country subsided outwardly into stagnation. The conflict between the hereditary authority of the German princes and the growing political consciousness of the German people which, in varying forms and with varying intensity, constitutes the

central theme of German inner history during the nineteenth century up to the World War, profoundly affected the position of the armed forces.

In the absolute monarchy of the eighteenth century the army had been an instrument of foreign policy in the hands of the monarch, almost completely divorced from the life of the people. The reformers had striven to release it from that isolation so as to base it upon the physical and moral energies of the whole nation. But they had always envisaged the nation as united behind its rulers and the army exclusively in its external role as the common bulwark against foreign aggression. Now the army, for the first time since the second half of the seventeenth century, during which it had helped to establish the absolute monarchy against the resistance of the medieval estates, was dragged out of its unpolitical position into the very midst of political strife. To the liberal struggling for the vindication of his political rights, it appeared no longer simply a shield against external aggression but the actual or potential instrument of internal repression, and he therefore tried to bring it under his own control, to render it innocuous. The rulers, on the other hand, stubbornly refused to let that control out of their own hands, even when they had granted in one form or the other, some measure of representative government. Thus the whole internal struggle in the last resort concentrated itself upon the question who was to command this decisive factor in the inner political balance of power.

The struggle reached its climax in the great trial of strength between William I of Prussia and his parliament over the Army Reform of 1860. The decision on that issue in favor of the King and the army was the most important event in the history of the Prusso-German army since Scharnhorst's reform—it went in favor of the Crown through the genius of Bismarck, and his subsequent unification in the new "Reich" of all German states with the sole exception of Austria seemed for a time to have brought a solution. But the fundamental conflict had been cut short, not solved; the decision proved after all but a temporary makeshift, beneath which the fire continued to glow, until, under the stress of the World War, it broke out into open flame again.

II

It was a fatal point in this development that the work of the Prussian reformers was cut short almost as soon as it had served its immediate aim of organizing the revolt against Napoleon.

By turning his back upon these "patriotic hotheads and dangerous innovators," Frederick William III eliminated the only element that might have been able to mediate between the absolute monarchy and the rising claims of the Liberals and might have solved that conflict along the lines of peaceful evolution.

Fortunately, before the reformers had to leave the scene they were able to bring the military part of their program to a successful conclusion. In 1814, during the interval between the two campaigns against Napoleon, Boyen, appointed Minister of War, was able to execute his master's testament by establishing the principle of universal conscription on the lines of the previous co-ordination of Standing Army and Landwehr. By the *Wehrordnung* of 1814, supplemented by the *Landwehrordnung* of the following year, all citizens were made liable to serve for three years (from 20 to 23) in the Standing Army, which in war was to be brought up to full strength by the reservists of the next two classes (24 and 25). The bulk of the trained reserves, the seven classes from 26 to 32 years of age, were formed into the Landwehr destined to fight shoulder to shoulder with the regular "regiments of the line."

By this scheme—in some respects very similar to the recent co-ordination of Regular and Territorial Army in Great Britain—he hoped to combine the superior military efficiency and discipline of a standing force with those peculiar patriotic virtues which the reformers had been at such pains to arouse in the mass of the nation. To that end he was anxious to preserve and foster the Landwehr's peculiar status as essentially a "citizen" force—based indeed on conscription, but relying rather upon spontaneous enthusiasm—by keeping it as far as possible apart from the contaminating influences of the Standing Army and linking it up with civilian life. Small fortified arsenals scattered throughout the country were to form rallying points for local resistance in time of war and centers of military training in time of peace. The officers of the Landwehr were to be drawn principally from the local "bourgeoisie," privileged to serve only one year provided they had acquired a certain degree of education and were able to equip and maintain themselves at their own expense.

Before Boyen had had time to develop the Landwehr system properly, he was forced out of office in 1819 by the growing power of the reactionaries, and he was followed by Grolman, then Chief of the General Staff. Gneisenau, had already given up

the command of the Rhenish Army Corps at Coblenz three years before. Thus the reformers with the sole exception of Clausewitz, were practically eliminated from the army.

In Prussia and throughout the whole north of Germany, political life after 1815 subsided into stagnation for nearly thirty years. The center of the internal political struggle shifted for a time to the smaller South and Central German territories. There, in the diets established in most of these states in the years after the Napoleonic Wars, liberalism began its onslaught upon the standing army. The extremists denounced these "mercenary hordes" in wild terms and demanded their abolition in favor of a popular militia. The more sober elements concentrated upon an attempt to subject them to an oath on the constitution. For many years the struggle for these demands met with little success, but in the spring of 1848, when the powers of reaction overnight crumpled up before the half-tragic, half-fantastic intermezzo of the Revolution, their realization at last seemed to be within reach. In practically all German states the troops were sworn in on the constitutions, a popular militia was conceded in many cases, and in one state, Baden, the standing army itself was "democratized." The National Assembly in Frankfurt, in its deliberations on the future federal constitution, envisaged the extension of the Prussian Landwehr system to the whole of Germany, the co-ordination of all individual armies in a federal force, and their swearing in on the federal constitution.

The breakdown of this revolution put an end to all these dreams and left the first round in the struggle with the governments. In the period of reaction that followed the concessions made were annulled and resistance, where it was attempted in Saxony, Baden, and the Palatinate, was broken by the Prussian Army. It was only a dozen years later, after that reaction in its turn had exhausted itself, that the second and far more serious struggle broke out in Prussia.

There Frederick William IV, the brilliant but erratic son of Frederick William III, after yielding at first to the revolution had, through the unswerving loyalty of the army, emerged triumphant and re-established his authority practically unimpaired. The constitution, which he imposed rather than granted in 1850 as an outward concession to the spirit of the age, did not restrict the royal power in any serious respect. The diet or Landtag was indeed granted the right to vote the budget, but the cabinet remained responsible to the King, not to the Landtag,

and therefore independent of any parliamentary vote of censure. The extra-parliamentary basis of the royal power, the fact that the army was the King's and only the King's, after the attempt to tamper with it in 1848, was expressly safeguarded in the constitution. Article 46 established the King's undivided and uncontrolled power of command; Article 108 excluded any attempt to impose upon the army an oath on the constitution. Thus when the forces of the opposition after an eclipse of nearly a decade returned to the attack, their struggle to establish parliamentary control and reduce the military monarchy of the Hohenzollern to the status of the constitutional regimes of the West concentrated upon this central pillar of the royal power.

The concrete issue over which the conflict finally broke out was the attempt of the new regent, Prince William, who in 1858 had assumed the regency for his brother, to remedy the profound defects in the Prussian military system revealed by the mobilization of 1850. Since its institution in 1815 the "Landwehr System" had never been adapted to the growing manpower of the country. Its yearly contingent of recruits still stood at 40,000 at a time when the population had risen from 11 to 18 millions, and the class yearly available for conscription to some 155,000. In these circumstances universal conscription had become almost a farce: men who had once been conscripted and trained were called up for service long after they had passed their military prime, while thousands of much younger men, who had escaped conscription, were left at home. This inadequate exploitation of the country's manpower was the more intolerable since the Landwehr had failed to fulfill Boyen's high expectations. The more mature outlook of the Landwehr men, upon which he had counted to offset their lack of youthful elasticity, had merely served to accentuate their lack of discipline and non-military spirit. Its officers, chosen up to the grade of captain mainly from the ranks of the "one-year volunteers," could not in any way compare with the regular officers of the line. The result was that the Landwehr, at the times when it had been called to the colors, had proved completely unequal to the demands made upon it, and by its intimate combination with the Standing Army threatened to reduce the efficiency of that force also.

To remedy this state of things, the Prince Regent saw no other way than to abolish the dualism of Standing Army and Landwehr by constituting the first the "army in the field," and transforming the Landwehr into a reserve, entrusted with secondary

duties in its rear. To that end the Standing Army was to be greatly strengthened, both by being considerably enlarged and by being allotted five, instead of hitherto only two, classes of reservists, and the Landwehr was to be cut down from seven to four classes, embracing the men from 29 to 32 years of age.

In 1859 Prussia mobilized nine army corps during the Franco-Austrian War, calling some 55,000 married men to the colors, while some 150,000 younger men escaped service. The Prince Regent upon demobilization proposed to retain the skeleton corps of the Landwehr regiments just formed, and he submitted to the Landtag the project of a law authorizing an increase of the yearly contingent from 40,000 to 63,000 men and the establishment of thirty-nine new regiments. The Minister of War, von Bonin, hesitated to assume the responsibility for such far-reaching measure and was replaced by Albrecht von Roon, an officer of great talents and strength of character.

To the Prince Regent and his collaborators the issue appeared a simple technical problem: the restoration of the military strength of Prussia by means best adapted to that purpose. But their project seemed to the Liberal majority controlling the Landtag to contain political implications which immediately aroused their apprehension and opposition. Since the Wars of Liberation, the Landwehr had been the favorite child of Liberalism. Legend had magnified its very creditable achievements in that struggle, until in the popular imagination it completely outshone the Standing Army. In contrast to the latter, which was regarded with suspicion as the instrument of the ruler and of reaction, the Landwehr was acclaimed as the true "citizen force." Its officers' corps, drawn chiefly from the classes that formed the backbone of the Liberal movement, was felt to be a guarantee against the possibility of its being misused as an instrument of internal repression. To cut down this popular element of the army, which after 1848 had been ruthlessly purged of all officers sympathizing with the popular movement, roused the misgivings of men who felt themselves on the threshold of a new struggle for the establishment of parliamentary control.

Consequently the Landtag made its acceptance of the plan dependent upon a reduction of the period of service from three to two years, and when that was refused, rejected the law. As a compromise it voted the money necessary for reorganization provisionally for one year. The following year it repeated the procedure, adding the rider that a new military law regulating

the situation should be submitted by the Government in the next session.

In the new parliament, however, the radical elements predominated, and when the Government again refused to consider the restriction of military service to two years, the Landtag cut the appropriation out of the budget altogether, thus raising the fundamental issue whether the King's prerogative entitled him to undertake the reorganization without the authorization of a law and the appropriation of the necessary funds by the Landtag. On that point even Roon felt doubtful and therefore had been inclined to compromise on the question of service so as to avoid an acute conflict, but the King—Prince William had succeeded his brother in the autumn of 1861—remained adamant. In his eyes the whole work of reorganization stood or fell with the three years' service. Not that he considered it impossible to train a man in less time, but in his opinion only such a prolonged training could inculcate in him the necessary discipline and military spirit. Thus the conflict over the reorganization of the army developed into a fundamental trial of strength between the Crown and the Landtag.

The leaders of the Landtag hoped to force from the King the recognition of the minister's responsibility to the Landtag and a change of the constitution of the upper chamber, the *Herrenhaus*. In the Government's camp the extreme reactionaries hoped that some incautious move in the Landtag would give them the opportunity to call in the troops and overthrow the constitution by force. Detailed plans for the concentration of 50,000 men with one hundred guns in and around Berlin had been worked out and sealed orders delivered to all military commanders. The King, a man of honor, a devout Christian, incapable of tampering with the oath he had sworn on the constitution, was far from such ideas, but he felt that in instituting the reorganization he had been acting within his rights as commander in chief. Perplexed to find even his cabinet doubtful, he saw no other way out of the situation than to abdicate and let his son, later Emperor Frederick III, the son-in-law of Queen Victoria, who was known for his liberal sympathies, make peace with the new age.

At that critical moment, Roon in a famous telegram summoned his friend Bismarck, then Prussian Ambassador to Napoleon III, to Berlin and induced the hesitating King to grant him an interview. In a remarkable conversation in the little palace of Babelsberg, midway between Berlin and Potsdam, Bismarck

declared himself ready to carry on the government and the work of reorganization in the teeth of the Landtag opposition, if necessary to the scaffold. The King thereupon declared that in those circumstances he felt it his duty to fight on. By the ingenious argument that when King and parliament could not agree there occurred a deadlock for which the constitution contained no provision, Bismarck overcame his colleague's constitutional qualms and proceeded to enter upon a desperate struggle with the infuriated Landtag.

III

The reorganization of the Prussian Army, which could not have been completed without his intervention, put Bismarck in the saddle and allowed him to end the internal conflict by appealing to the external success which he had been able to achieve by means of it. Within four years of his taking up the reins of government the Prussian Army was rejuvenated, homogeneous, efficient. It had won the old German duchies of Schleswig-Holstein from the Danes, had decided the hundred-year-old Austro-Prussian rivalry in Germany on the battlefields of Bohemia, and had united the whole of the former German Empire north of the Main in the "Norddeutscher Bund." On the eve of that success Bismarck was far too wise and realistic to follow the advice of the reactionaries and use his success to smash the liberal movement. On the contrary he made his peace with the Landtag, by officially demanding from it indemnity for the money spent without its consent, a gesture of reconciliation that met with full response from the new national-liberal movement.

Four years later the Prussian Army, now increased by contingents from the South and Central German states, which in 1866 had fought on the side of Austria, brought back from the battle-fields of France not only Alsace-Lorraine, but the unity of all Germany, with the exception of the German parts of Austria, and the imperial Crown.

IV

With the restoration of the Empire the work of internal reconciliation seemed to have been completed. The dream of the nation over so many years, unity in a great, powerful state, had at last been realized. Its claim to a share in the control of its fate seemed to be fulfilled in the Reichstag, based upon universal suffrage. Yet, a close observer of the new structure might have realized

the weak points in its framework that were destined to make it a much less durable edifice than was hoped and believed in those first days of joy and national exultation.

Despite the ingenuity of its construction, Bismarck's Reich was a compromise, and not even a very progressive compromise. It represented on the larger, national scale, the consolidation of that monarchical predominance which he had preserved for his own king in his fight against the Landtag. The new Reich was founded by him as the Union of the German Princes. It was the Princes, not the nation, who resolved to found the Reich, pool their authority in the *Bundesrat*, and elect out of their midst the venerable King of Prussia as their hereditary leader and Emperor. The German nation, whose house it was to be, had had little more to do with it than to accept and confirm their decisions. The Chancellor, as the sole responsible minister of the Reich, was responsible to the Emperor, not to the Reichstag. The latter, the political voice of the nation, had no direct influence on the constitution of the Government and only limited powers of indirectly influencing its actions by its budgetary rights. On the whole it was incapable of effectively influencing the course of events. What little opportunities in that direction the constitution had left open, Bismarck himself destroyed in the coming years; the intolerance of any political power beside his own was the dark side of his great and imposing personality. In 1878 he broke the National Liberal Party which had followed him with so much devotion and self-sacrifice. The results of the powerlessness which Bismarck imposed upon the Reichstag were seen in the decades after his death, when the impotence to which he had reduced the Reichstag drove the potential leaders of the younger generation to seek their fortunes in business, industry, or the army rather than in a career that offered no opening to leadership or ambition. Its political and intellectual sterilization was complete.

This political "decapitation" of the German nation in the decades following the creation of the new Reich was the heavy price paid for the genius which accomplished it; but it would never have reached the extent it did, unless the new generation itself had unwittingly played into Bismarck's hands. However narrow, doctrinaire, unwise, even ridiculous the views of the Liberals during their abortive struggle for political power may often appear to us today, they were at least the expression of a genuine political will to be master of their fate.

To the younger generation, however, which grew up under the new Reich, and had no memory of the political struggles that had preceded and accompanied its birth, all questions seemed to be solved with its creation, and the authority of Bismarck was so overwhelming as to make any further effort of their own unnecessary. In the flush of national victory, the German bourgeoisie forgot the political defeat which it had suffered, forgot that it had struggled for a great moral issue, bowed before the golden calf of success and, indulging in the cult of a *Realpolitik* which it did not understand, relapsed into its former servility, and turned from politics to more lucrative occupations.

In no other field was this change in the bourgeoisie's outlook so conspicuous as in its attitude towards the army. The exaggerated but honest opposition, which during the conflict had led even men of the social standing of the deputy Freiherr von Hoverbeck, or the world-famous surgeon Virchow, to inveigh against the mercenary hordes and denounce them as serving merely to exhaust the country, gave way to excessive adulation. Three victorious campaigns endowed the army with a popularity such as it had never enjoyed before. As the social prestige of the officers increased to an absurd extent, the middle class and other groups, like the higher aristocracy and the sons of financiers and industrialists, which had held aloof from the army, began to press in increasing numbers for admittance into their ranks, while the civilian aimed at being at least connected with it as a reserve officer.

The popularity of the army ensured that its needs received favorable consideration in the Reichstag. If Bismarck had not seen fit to use the military budget as in 1887 as a tactical means for breaking the power of the Liberals by discrediting them before the nation as "enemies of the army," the old feud inherited from the Landtag would have remained dead and buried. As a result the army became again the object of considerable controversy and opposition, particularly from the more radical Liberals and the rising Socialist party, which, in its radical opposition to the army as the instrument of the hated "class-state," took over to a large extent the arguments and ideology originally developed by the Liberals in their early attack upon the standing army. Although these attacks served to create in the army growing ill-feeling against the Reichstag, on the whole its demands were successful whenever the Government really pressed for their recognition. The decline in the military development of the

nation's manpower from 1900 onwards was due to the Government's lack of initiative, not to opposition from the Reichstag.

Thus outwardly during the forty-four years between 1871 and the World War the German Army experienced a long period of consolidation and uninterrupted progress. The curious constitution of the Reich as a federation of princes found expression in the fact that, besides the Prussian Army,¹ the three lesser kingdoms, Saxony, Württemberg and Bavaria, retained their separate armies, separate Ministers of War, and, in the case of Bavaria, even a separate general staff. But these remnants of the former political disintegration of Germany did not seriously affect the fundamental unity of the army. All questions of service and organization were uniformly decided in the Reichstag, not in the diets of the four kingdoms. In all political issues the overwhelming superiority of the Prussian Army insured the necessary unity of outlook and training, so that from 1871 we can speak henceforth of *the* German army, although complete fusion did not take place until after the World War.

As a result of this practical unification the lesser contingents rapidly adapted their general constitution and tactical and strategic training to the Prussian model. Only the Bavarian Army retained a considerable measure of independence, notably in the more democratic composition and stricter intellectual selection of its officers' corps. The revolution in tactical ideas brought about by the Franco-German War for a time led to a state of anarchy in which each army corps developed its own peculiar tactics, but it was overcome by the great Field Regulations in 1888, which in the main determined the tactical training and outlook of the German Army down to the World War. In the same year, in answer to the extraordinary efforts made by France, the period of liability to serve in the various forms (active army, Reserve, Landwehr 1st Levy, Landwehr 2nd Levy, Landsturm) was consolidated and extended to 45 years.

The spirit of the German army did not appreciably suffer from the long period of uninterrupted peace that followed upon the wars of unification. The realistic outlook of the German soldier and the work of the General Staff prevented a recurrence of the decline that followed 1815; they succeeded to an astonishing degree in counteracting the lack of practical experience. Never in all its history had it been so much "in form" as on the eve of

¹The Prussian Army included contingents from nearly all North Germany, from Alsace-Lorraine, and from the South German States of Baden and Hesse.

the First World War, not as the result of any special effort, but as the final harvest of more than four decades of steady, conscientious, unobtrusive work. If in retrospect one does not feel that period in the history of the German Army to have been one of unqualified progress, it is not because of anything connected with its immediate work and life—although there, too, many defects could be pointed out in different fields—but because of the remarkable change for the worse which German life underwent during those decades—a change which the army as a part of the nation could not hope to escape.

In passing from the generation that struggled against Napoleon to that of the Revolution of 1848 and the unification of the Reich in 1871, one cannot but notice a remarkable narrowing of the outlook. In place of the humanitarian idealism that inspired the older generation, prompting it to relate everything it touched immediately to the fundamental problems and principles of human existence, its undogmatic religious feeling, its cosmopolitan dreams and often exuberant sentimentality, one finds a strictly limited sense of immediate concrete duties, an orthodox, if genuine, Christianity, a narrow political provincialism, a calculating though not necessarily unkind shrewdness—the spirit of the rising middle class which gradually began to dominate the whole outlook of public life.

The change came between the generation which witnessed the French Revolution and the struggle against Napoleon and that which passed through the abortive revolution of 1848 to the resurrection of the Reich in 1870-1. The period roughly from 1790 to 1830 possesses in the history of the German nation a unique significance, not because of the great but tragic political events that ended, as we have seen, in bitter disappointment, but because of the outburst of spiritual energy which makes that period of German history comparable in a sense to the Italy of the Renaissance and the Athens of Pericles. As in those two other epochs great poets and thinkers suddenly arose to explore and express the whole of human existence and experience, giving German life an intellectual and spiritual intensity such as it has known neither before nor since. In the reformers this idealistic wave found its way even into the closed precincts of the military world and for a short period linked it up with the general life of the nation.

In the generation that followed, this wave of idealism under the influence of the rising middle class gave way to a matter-of-

fact sobriety. Cosmopolitan dreams yielded to the realities of the nation's struggle for constitutional government and unity, the free religious feeling to orthodox Christianity, the tendency to envisage everything in the light of ultimate principles to a narrow practical outlook. In the army this change was even more pronounced than in civil life. Its leaders the old Emperor William, Roon, Manteuffel, and their contemporaries, had lost contact with the general life of the nation and the great traditions of German thought which had been such a source of inspiration and strength to the reformers. Strong, simple characters, often of great independence, they drew their strength from a deep, unreflecting, religious feeling and the traditions of the Prussian officer. Exclusively soldiers in their outlook, brought up in an unquestioning belief in the old Prussian monarchy and its army, they were unable to understand the new political forces growing up around them, and they felt isolated in a world with which they found themselves more and more in discord. At Versailles, amidst the rejoicings for the new Reich, a man like Roon realized sadly that his own time, the time of the old Prussia, had irrevocably gone, and his King realized the same. The only one amongst them who had preserved something of the broader spirit and wider interests of that earlier age and therefore showed a far deeper appreciation of the political issues of his time—was Moltke.

After the reconstitution of the Reich, the narrowing of the great spiritual impulses of the Napoleonic age progressed further and more rapidly. With the new empire and the increase in prosperity which accompanied the transition of Germany from a primarily agrarian country to one of the leading industrial powers, a new spirit of almost cynical realism began to replace the former idealistic outlook of the German nation.

The old ideals were not openly discarded, except in the political sphere, where, as we have seen, they gave way to an imperialism as robust as it was superficial. But the materialism of German life was most evident in the way in which people continued to pay lip service to the old gods long after they had ceased to possess any real significance. Religion lost its vitality; philosophy was almost dead; education degenerated into the mere inculcation of useful and practical knowledge; public spirit began to wane. A reaction against this began with the turn of the century, but it was too weak to affect the general trend to any appreciable degree.

In the disintegration of German life the army, as the representative of the Old Prussian spirit, stood like a monolithic block in a changing landscape. Although it continued to emphasize its tradition and oppose it to the laxer temper of the world surrounding it, it was not unaffected. With growing prosperity, luxury appeared in the officers' mess despite the orders issued against it by William II who, by his expensive passion for renaming regiments and redesigning their uniforms, failed to set an appropriate example and imposed heavy expenses upon officers. Officers in crack cavalry regiments required private incomes of up to 600 marks per month. The old virtues of the officers' corps were not as carefully preserved as they should have been. In the selection of commanders the importance of tact or noblemindedness was not always sufficiently appreciated. Moral independence was not encouraged. "If the regulations demanded from the commanders that they should foster the spirit of responsibility amongst their subordinates, they certainly were not assisted in this task from above, for every officer in whose command something unusual happened that smacked of an offence against regulations felt the ground tremble beneath his feet," writes not a critic but a man who set out to give a picture of "the best army Germany ever had."

That fact should warn us, however, not to overstress these deficiencies which had thus gradually crept into the spirit and the inner cohesion of the German Army in the years before 1914. Under the tremendous wave of enthusiasm of August 1914 they were for the time being swept aside.

It was only when the rapid victory for which it had been trained did not materialize and the war dragged on year after year that these subtle weaknesses became the cracks through which the rot penetrated the whole structure. The dissociation of the army leaders from the life and outlook of the civilian population in the end was to prove the greatest weakness of Germany in the First World War.

v

The internal structure of the German Army underwent profound changes during the nineteenth century. One of the main achievements of the reform had been the breaking down of the obsolete prejudice by which the officers' ranks had been almost exclusively reserved to the nobly born, and the substitution of an examination and selection by the officers' corps of a unit. These

efforts of the reformers to broaden the social bases of the Prussian officers' corps, like all their achievements, were to a large extent destroyed again during the long years of reaction that followed Boyen's retirement from the Ministry of War. During the wars of liberation the officers' corps had experienced a large influx of bourgeois elements in the guise of "volunteers" (*Freiwillige Jäger*) who had been promoted to a commission and at the end of the hostilities preferred to stay in the army rather than go back to a civilian profession. The result was that for a time the balance between the noble and non-noble elements became almost equal. In 1818 there were 3,828 officers of aristocratic birth to 3,350 officers of bourgeois origin. In the subsequent period of reaction these volunteer elements of greatly varying quality and antecedents were gradually eliminated and the aristocratic character of the officers' corps was re-established. In 1850 nearly two-thirds of the officers were of noble origin.

Simultaneously the general outlook of the officers' corps suffered a marked decline, as the impulses of reform and of the wars died down and gave way to the drab routine of nearly half a century of peace. In his memoirs Prince Krafft of Hohenlohe Ingelfingen, a famous artillery commander of the Moltke period, gives a vivid picture of the stagnation that characterized the Prussian army during the later years of Frederick William III and the reign of Frederick William IV. "There was a great deal of decency, sense of duty and devotion to their work among the officers of that time, so great that it has perhaps never been surpassed. But there was very little private initiative amongst them. In fact, men who were inclined to give proof of such independence found themselves sneered at and ostracized as 'pushers' so that they preferred to renounce it. Thirty-three years of peace (from 1815 to 1848) with their unchanging dull routine, with monotonous round of service, with very slow promotion, had resulted in a state of things in which everybody performed mechanically what he was ordered to do, never devoted a thought to its purpose and saw in a good autumn review the crown of his endeavors."

That picture was not the whole truth. During those same years men like Roon and Moltke, both desperately poor young officers, fought their way upwards to the top of their profession, and others, less prominent, followed suit. In general, however, the Prussian officers by 1850, in the judgment of the most competent observers, had become worse even than in 1806. Fate, however,

spared the Prussian Army at that moment the ultimate test and gave it the time to recover its former excellence before it was called upon to fight again. From 1857 to 1865 General von Manteuffel, as head of the Military Cabinet, through which the Prussian King exercised his command, carried through, as part of the reorganization of 1860, a thorough reorganization of the officers' corps with highly beneficial results. Thanks to this vigorous shake-up and the influence of excellent drill-masters, such as Prince Frederick Charles, the Prussian regimental officer regained more than his former excellence and in the wars of unification (1864, 1866, 1870-1) gave proof of all his traditional bravery and of a surprisingly high standard of independence and leadership, forgetting on the field of battle the inhibiting habits of the drilling ground, and adapting himself with remarkable elasticity to the practical requirements of a concrete situation. The same was not equally true of the higher commanders, generals and army leaders, amongst whom outstanding personalities like Goeben were rare, and complete failures by no means absent.

In the Empire the practical unification of all German military contingents led to a far-reaching assimilation of the officers of the smaller contingents to the Prussian model, with the sole exception of the Bavarian army, which, adapting itself militarily, continued to retain its peculiar social structure. At the same time the Prussian officers' corps itself underwent a profound change through the widening of its social basis, which began with the reorganization of 1860. This gradual extension of the circles from which the officers' corps was allowed to select its members received a new impulse at the accession of William II. The bourgeois element grew rapidly until from 35 per cent in 1860 it had by 1913 risen to 70 per cent.

As a result, the aristocratic elements tended more and more to concentrate in a number of "select" regiments. The Prussian Guards, in which this process had started already under William I, the garrison regiments in the capitals of the smaller princes, where the officers enjoyed the contact with Court life, and certain famous cavalry regiments developed more and more into aristocratic preserves and looked down upon the ordinary regiments of the line. A typical example of this process was the Infantry Regiment 145 at Metz. By a sudden whim of the Kaiser, who wished to show that this regiment with the "highest number" in the army was as dear to his heart as any other, it was raised

to the rank of "King's Infantry Regiment." The Emperor made himself its first- and the King of Italy its second-in-command. The result of this pointless promotion was the immediate replacement of the bourgeois regimental commander by one of aristocratic birth and an increase in the "artistocratic character" of its officers' corps from 26 per cent in 1895 to 67 per cent in 1905. This abuse became so widespread that from 1908 onwards the authorities began to oppose it energetically, with the result that the Guards corps which in that year counted only four non-noble officers, by 1913 had fifty-nine.

These tendencies were not, however, strong enough seriously to affect the fundamental unity of the officer corps. Above all difference of class, rank, and wealth, it continued to feel itself one great community, a wider "aristocracy of the sword" (*Berufssadel*), in which the officer of bourgeois origin, by receiving his sword-knot, the symbol of his status, and adapting himself to its traditions, became the equal of the born aristocrat.

VI

The second great social development within the Prusso-German Army during the nineteenth century was the accentuation of the class line between the officers on the one hand, and the noncommissioned officers and the rank and file on the other. In the eighteenth century, despite the fundamental social division between the officers and their men, the gulf between them was not as impassable as one might have thought. In general the barriers between the various social orders themselves seem to have been far more fluid than later on and no clear-cut line divided as yet the noncommissioned from the commissioned officers. All officers had to start their careers in the ranks of the NCOs, either as "free-corporals," or simply by working their way upwards from the ranks.² These aristocrats and well-to-do bourgeois merely passed through the NCOs ranks as a ladder to their future destination, but even the NCOs coming from the lower orders were not without all hope of eventually joining the ranks of their superiors. The "Regulations for the Infantry of 1726" envisaged the promotion of qualified noncommissioned officers after at least twelve years' service to the rank of sub-lieutenant. That regulation was clearly a survival of an earlier stage in which the officers still belonged mainly to a profession,

²This applied particularly to the artillery, to which the system of "free-corporals" was extended only in 1787.

not a social body. Although such promotion became rarer and rarer under Frederick the Great, promotion from the ranks to a commission for exceptional bravery on the field continued, so that actually a considerable number of Frederick's officers had risen by their valor from the lower orders to the upper class and not infrequently to high rank. Owing to the low standards of education amongst the officers of that age the assimilation was not so difficult as later on.

The barrier between the various orders in the army was never more fluid and the chances for able men from the lower orders to rise to a commission and to high rank in the service was never greater than under the reformers, owing to their opposition to all class monopolies and their struggle in favor of talent, wherever it might be found. The most famous case of that sort was that of General Reyher. Starting as a simple company clerk, he rose to sergeant major, passed his officers' examination, and self-taught qualified for the general staff. He became successively chief of staff to Prince William of Prussia when in command of the Third Army Corps and later of the Guards, head of the General Department of the Ministry of War, acting Minister of War in 1848, and finally chief of the general staff and predecessor to Field Marshal Moltke.

During the long period of peace that followed the wars of liberation, the gulf between the "upper" and the "lower" orders became more pronounced and the possibility of any man's rising to a commission more remote. As the upper stratum of the bourgeoisie coalesced with the aristocracy in a new "upper class," it separated itself from the lower middle class. In that process one of the most important dividing lines, steadily increasing in importance as time drew on, was the privilege enjoyed by those who had passed a certain examination or its equivalent in the school curriculum, and who were able to equip and maintain themselves from their own means, of serving only one year instead of two or three, with the prospect of being selected in due course for the Landwehr and later the Reserve Officers.

Although originally a purely military privilege this institution of *Einjährige*, as it was called, became more and more the fundamental social dividing line between the "educated" and "uneducated" classes. Within the ranks of those who had achieved this distinction differences no doubt existed. Service in the *Einjährige* opened only the *possibility* and not the *certainty* of promotion to the officers' rank. As long as the *Einjährigen*

were transferred to the Landwehr, social discrimination seems not to have been very great and the officers of the Landwehr consisted to a large extent of typical representatives of the lower middle class. But when, as a result of the reorganization of 1860, they were henceforth attached as Reserve Officers to the regiments of the line, not only their training but also their social selection was taken far more seriously. There was a superabundance of candidates; in the years before the war there were yearly some 15,000 *Einjährige* in Germany against a total body of Reserve Officers of a little over 29,000 in 1914. This made strict selection possible, all "undesirable" elements, such as Jews or those of lower middle-class origin were excluded from that highly coveted distinction and relegated to the rank of reserve NCOs.

Thus the *Einjährige* formed a formidable dividing line and helped to widen the gulf between the upper and lower orders. Henceforth, in contrast to the eighteenth century, the military careers of the two were strictly separated. The officers, after being provisionally accepted by a regiment, began by passing their ensign's examination, then served for a short period (five-six months with the infantry and cavalry, nine months with the artillery and the engineers) in the ranks. In that time they were promoted to NCO or ensign and were then transferred to the different military schools. From there, if they passed their officer's examination successfully, they were elected officers. The *Einjährige* could become after six months' service lance corporal, after nine months NCO, and at the end of their year, having passed a special examination, eligible to appointment as a reserve officer. After two periods of training of eight weeks each during the two following years and a further examination, they could finally be elected reserve officers. Those who for various reasons were unable to attain this were trained as NCOs or as deputy officers.

The mass of the people had to serve either two or three years, according to the term of service in force, and during that time could engage voluntarily for a further period of three years, normally extended to twelve years in all. They could rise to the rank of NCO and, in particularly lucky cases, to that of sergeant major. After twelve years' service these professional NCOs were normally dismissed and placed in suitable positions as subordinate officials in the constabulary, the postal service, and other similar places. While the old type of lifelong NCO of the eighteenth century disappeared, the modern NCOs of the nineteenth cen-

tury developed into a special body below the officers' corps, ranking socially with the rank and file and with no hope in time of peace of rising from the one to the other. In time of war the promotion to commissioned rank for bravery in the field was never entirely dropped, but became more and more rare in practice, as the differences in social status made the assimilation of those thus promoted more difficult. Even after the wars against Napoleon officers thus promoted had to go through a one year's course and pass a special examination. Many resigned voluntarily as they did not think themselves capable of serving as officers. In the wars of unification such promotions were infinitely rarer, and of the twenty-eight NCOs promoted in the field during 1864 and 1866, no less than one quarter had left the service in 1867, and of the rest only a handful seems to have carried on and risen to higher positions.

Thus we find towards the end of the century an almost impassable gulf separating the officers and the *Einjährigen* from the rank and file and the NCOs who had risen from it, a development that was to acquire great significance during World War I.

VII

The effective mobilization of the whole strength of the nation and the excellence of the regimental officer were the two solid pillars upon which the predominance of the Prusso-German arms in the second half of the 19th Century rested. By themselves alone, however, they would have been insufficient to insure that almost unbroken series of successes that attended German arms. Something more was needed to prepare and coordinate them for victory: the superior mastery of the art of war developed by a unique succession of great military thinkers and leaders that found its institutional embodiment in the Great General Staff.

The rise of a German school of military theory and strategy was in large part the result of the general intensification of German thought around the turning of the century and the rise of the new form of warfare simultaneously developed in France. In the French Revolution the sociological and political limitations that had fettered warfare were broken. Mobilization of the patriotic fervor of citizens in the defense of their newly won liberty aroused an energy unknown among the paid mercenary armies of the preceding centuries. Development of suitable forms of organization, of supplies, of marching, and elasticity of tactics, made the exploitation of these moral energies possible.

Out of this raw material the genius of Napoleon forged the new weapon with which he swept his way through the breadth and length of Europe. Sensing, more by instinct than by any conscious reasoning, the wholly novel possibilities of the instrument created by the Revolution, he inspired his campaigns with a vigor, an intensity and directness of purpose unknown since the days of Alexander and of the Romans. From the outset he aimed at the complete, irrevocable overthrow of the enemy's power of resistance and pursued that aim with the utmost concentration of will power and resource.

His unique achievement required not only exceptional vision and daring, but a coordinative effort which has rarely received the attention due to it. For the swift and sweeping moves with which he overthrew the arrangements of his opponents and enmeshed them in the net of his maneuvers depended upon the most skilful coordination of a number of independent units, the various army corps and the army cavalry. Above all it depended upon the skill with which Napoleon used his cavalry both for the concealment of his own and the unveiling of his enemy's movements as well as for relentless pursuit.

In all the activity of coordination required by his new decisive mobile strategy, Napoleon had no real assistants. Berthier, his nominal Chief of Staff, was nothing but an administrative "Chef de Bureau," while the mass of his General Staff were merely the transmitters and executors of his orders, not independent, responsible collaborators. Only a man of his titanic will power and capacity for work could have carried that enormous load alone. The marvel is not that he succumbed under it in the end, but that he was able to carry it for so long, and with such startling efficiency and success.

It was Scharnhorst who earlier and better than anyone else penetrated the secret of Napoleon's revolutionary strategy. What was more, Scharnhorst realized what Napoleon never did: that its success depended upon the creation of an organ capable of insuring the effective subordination of the independent units to the central direction. Where Napoleon tried to do everything himself and finally broke down, Scharnhorst created the network of General Staff officers attached to the individual divisional commanders, through whom the commander in chief could make his will felt in all the major units of his force.

The innovation of this "General Staff with the Troops" and its combination with the central planning organ of the "Quarter-

master Generals Staff," constituted the outward framework of Scharnhorst's system. But its real secret lay not so much in these externals as in the training of the individual staff officer to consider himself as something more than a mere technical assistant, namely, as a responsible collaborator, taking a broad view of the situation as a whole in order to fulfill his functions with an intelligent appreciation of their relation to the entire issue at stake.

Grolman as Chief of Staff to General von Kleist, commanding the Prussian contingent with the main army, Boyen in the same position with General von Bülow, in charge of the first Prussian corps in Bernadotte's northern force, Rühle as Diplomatic Agent of Blücher's Headquarters, all extended their activities far beyond their nominal functions and exerted an influence upon the conduct of operations out of all proportion to their stations.

Considering themselves responsible collaborators in the integration of their respective units into the conduct of the campaign as a whole, influencing and often determining their commanders' decisions, keeping in close touch with one another, they had a pronounced share in bringing about that unity of purpose and action between the allied forces, which Prince Schwarzenberg would never have been able to achieve alone. Above all, it was Gneisenau who, as Chief of Staff to Blücher, was chiefly responsible by his example, as well as by his organization of Blücher's staff, for the consolidation of the Prussian general staff system and of the unique position of Chief of Staff.

With the end of the Wars of Liberation the General Staff was permanently institutionalized by Boyen, under the leadership of his old comrade Grolman. The Great General Staff or central planning organ became the Second Division of the Ministry of War, forming an integral body with the *Truppen-Generalstab* distributed over army corps and divisions. Under Grolman and his three successors, Müffling, Krauseneck, and Reyher, the organizational principles for the training and the exchange of the members of the General Staff between service in the Great General Staff, *Truppen-Generalstab*, and with the Line, were gradually elaborated, together with such fundamental training instruments as staff rides (started by Müffling) and the *Kriegespiel* or wargame developed out of the private endeavors of a group of enthusiastic young officers.

Under the leadership of these men the General Staff developed

into an institution without parallel in any other army of the time. It was a center of living thought, realistic planning, and unbureaucratic spirit. During the years of drab, dreary routine and drill ground training which followed the Wars of Liberation it preserved something of the spirit of Scharnhorst, until it could expand again under more favorable conditions.

That the General Staff succeeded in preserving the lessons learned at such cost in the struggle against Napoleon, was to a large extent the work of Clausewitz. Among the whole group of the Reformers, Clausewitz had been from the outset the theoretician par excellence. Not in the sense of a one-sided abstract academic pedant, but as a practical soldier, who at the same time happened to be that rare phenomenon, a natural born theorist; combining a keen appreciation of the requirements of a sound theory, with a unique understanding of the practical uses to which it could be put. During the wars against Napoleon a series of mishaps kept Clausewitz in relatively subordinate positions incommensurate with his exceptional abilities. After the peace had been reestablished, he was confined for twelve dreary years, from 1818 to 1830 to a purely administrative post as military director of the War Academy in Berlin. There, out of the intense feeling of frustration that forced him to seek an outlet for his gifts and energies in his private studies arose a long series of military studies, culminating in his famous treatise *On War*, the most profound, comprehensive, and systematic examination of war that has appeared to the present day.

An attempt at an analysis of the foundations, the nature and achievements of that work must be left to a more detailed independent study. Here it must be enough merely to indicate that he far transcended the two great inspirations of his life: Scharnhorst and Napoleon. Out of Scharnhorst's fragmentary and aphoristic heritage he developed the systematic, closely knit, perfectly balanced theory, in which every factor, every aspect, every argument had its place from which it could not be removed without fatally endangering the delicate balance of the whole. From the deep appreciation of the revolution wrought by Napoleon in the art of war, he reached an infinitely broader conception embracing within its elastic framework and majestic sweep every conceivable form of warfare and strategy.

Unfortunately, his transfer in 1830 to the post of artillery inspector in Breslau and his sudden death from the cholera in the following year, prevented him from recasting the whole work

in the light of his final concepts. He left but a torso of the vision he had seen. Nevertheless, the impression it made when it was published after his death through the devoted efforts of his widow and friends was extraordinary. The circle of those who noticed it was at first not large, and the magnitude of his achievement, even in its fragmentary form, was far too great to be taken in at once. But his perfect mastery of his subject, the intuitive genius with which he had succeeded in expressing what his contemporaries consciously or subconsciously felt, the charm of his style deeply affected all those who read it. By a process of infiltration, the influence of his ideas spread through the higher ranks of the army, influencing the thoughts of men and replacing the far more superficial, if much more easily assimilable, doctrines of his Swiss contemporary and rival Jomini. That process, going on unobtrusively throughout the middle decades of the 19th Century, came to a full and open conclusion after the sudden death of Reyher when the leadership of the General Staff was entrusted to Moltke, who combined in an almost perfect balance the technical mastery of the conduct of operations developed in the General Staff with his profound insight into the deeper issues developed in Clausewitz' great treatise.

VIII

The scion of an impoverished Mecklenburg family, Moltke had spent a hard and joyless youth in the Danish Cadet Corps at Copenhagen before entering the Prussian Army as a twenty-one-year-old lieutenant. Here his exceptional gifts overcame the unfavorable impression created by a none-too-military exterior. Within a year he had secured admittance to the Kriegesschule and after passing its course and spending two further years with his regiment, admission to the General Staff in which he was to rise to the highest rank in the German Army without having commanded as much as a company. Extensive summer maneuvers which at that time kept the officers of the General Staff in close contact with the troops for months at a stretch, served, however, to offset that deficiency to some extent; and four years spent in Turkey as a member of the Prussian Military Mission gave him a keen understanding of the difficulties and frictions of real warfare. After his return his intellectual and esthetic interests earned him positions as aide de camp first to Prince Henry and later to the Crown Prince of Prussia, introducing him to the courts of St. Petersburg and St. James's, and drawing the

favorable attention of the Prince Regent to his exceptionally reserved and reticent personality. His strategic abilities were so unquestioned that nobody was astonished when in 1857, after the sudden death of Reyher, he was called to take his place at the head of the General Staff.

That office had in the course of years receded far from the position acquired for it by Scharnhorst, Grolman and Müffling. Under Müffling's successors the Chief of the General Staff had become little more than the head of a research organ and had lost almost all influence on the life of the army. Questions of military organization and training were not referred to him, and in 1861 regulations for large scale maneuvers were issued by the ministry of war without consulting him. Even after 1864 his position was still so ill-defined that he had to make public his opinions on the tactical lessons of that campaign in the unofficial section of the *Militär Wochenblatt*. Even more significant was the fact that the great reorganization of the Prussian Army between 1860 and 1864 was carried through by Roon without reference to Moltke. The immense strengthening of the War Minister's prestige that resulted from it served further to suppress the Chief of the General Staff into a subordinate position. The right of independent report to the King that Müffling had secured in 1821 had lapsed by default under his successors. Only on special occasions was the Chief of the General Staff able to see the King, and then only in the presence of the Minister of War or in a general council. His information as to the political developments that formed the basis of all his planning were highly unsatisfactory. Not even the reports of the military attachés were regularly brought to his notice. The Minister of War kept him inadequately informed and direct official contacts with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs were lacking.

Thus Moltke saw himself restricted to his own immediate field, the study of contemporary developments in warfare and the training of the General Staff for the fulfillment of its functions. While the numbers of the forces had not increased to a very considerable extent beyond those controlled by Napoleon and his opponents, the development of roads, railways, and telegraph had greatly altered the conditions of their movement and direction. Thanks to the railway net troops could now be concentrated at the frontier within a fraction of the time formerly needed, while supply could be based upon the entire productive capacity of the country instead of upon stores laboriously con-

centrated in fortified magazines along the "basic line of operations." Far less certain was the use of the railways in the advance into enemy territory. But the dense net of first-class roads built in the last thirty years made far greater extension of armies possible and necessary. The telegraph enabled the High Command to control their major movements much more effectively than was possible in earlier campaigns, even though on the battlefield, the despatch rider still continued to be the only means of communication.

These profound changes in the practical application of the mobile strategy developed by Napoleon early struck Moltke's inquisitive mind. Even as a young officer he had written on the military uses of railways and invested his Turkish savings in the Hamburg-Berlin route. Now was the opportunity to utilize these new instruments in order to secure an advantage to his service. The abortive mobilization of 1859, in which Moltke as Chief of Staff of the IV Army Corps had been able to gather much practical experience, had convinced him of the necessity of placing the entire rail traffic in case of war into military hands. In order to carry this innovation through, a special Railway Section was created in the General Staff covering both the original mobilization as well as the subsequent conduct of operations. Special signal troops for the extension and repair of telegraph lines were set up.

Even more important than these institutional measures were Moltke's endeavors for the improvement of operational technique itself: efforts for the simplification and clarification of orders; studies in the deployment of large forces on roads; the setting up in 1862 of a special research department to coordinate the services of a number of specially qualified military historians, topographers, economists, and other experts. This department was converted three years later into the so-called "Supplementary Estate" (*Neben-Etat*). He took particular interest in the critical analysis of contemporary campaigns, in the Historical Section to which he contributed signalily.

The opportunity for the testing of this patient and unobtrusive work of preparation came in 1864. So uncertain, however, was as yet the official position of the Chief of the General Staff, that the post of Chief of Staff to Field Marshal Wrangel was at first given to another general, Vogel von Falckenstein. Moltke, left at his desk in Berlin, was requested to send in his suggestions, but otherwise kept so much in the dark that he had to seek in-

formation by private correspondence with friends on the Field Staff. Even when the King eventually set forth to visit field headquarters, he was not invited to join his suite. Only in the second half of the campaign after the storming of the Düppel forts, was Moltke made Chief of Staff to Wrangel, and later to Prince Frederick Charles. Brief as had been the active service in his campaign, it had, nevertheless, been sufficient to impress the King. "In his heart," wrote Manteuffel the next year, "the King is still resolved to conduct the next war himself and has chosen Moltke as his Chief of Staff, whose manner is entirely to his liking."

Even if these favorable personal factors had not existed, the logic of the situation would have necessitated some such a solution. Unlike the campaign against Denmark, the war against Austria and the South German States was a struggle against a numerically superior opponent. Only by the most careful planning and coordination could Prussia hope to offset this superiority and that meant that the Chief of the General Staff, who had prepared those plans had, under the supreme authority of the king, to become their practical executor. Thus by the famous Order of June 2, 1866, Moltke was virtually emancipated from the tutelage of the Minister of War and authorized to issue commands in the King's name on the basis of the proposals submitted by him in daily conferences. So novel was this system that Moltke had to intervene repeatedly in order to ensure obedience to his orders. This was particularly true where as Chief of Staff, he had to issue orders without first being able to secure the King's consent.

The unprecedented success of Königgrätz, and of the whole campaign decided by it, established his position once and for all. When four years later the German Armies were mobilized against France, he was immediately appointed Chief of Staff to the Royal Headquarters and all commanders were directed to report to and receive their orders directly from him. The King was too much of a soldier ever to abdicate his right to the ultimate decision, but he had the dignity and good sense in practice to bow before Moltke's superior genius. With but rare exceptions he approved the suggestions submitted to him daily by Moltke. While militarily this system thus worked fairly smoothly, its weakness was revealed in the latter stages of the campaign in the embittered conflict between Bismarck and Moltke. On purely objective grounds Bismarck, as the statesman conducting the war as a whole, should have been superordinated to Moltke, en-

trusted with its military prosecution. Owing to their joint responsibility to the King, however, Bismarck was constitutionally and in practice merely Moltke's equal; with the result that Moltke resented Bismarck's not unjustified demands as encroachments upon his own particular sphere.

Fundamentally the strategy which Moltke developed in the course of these three campaigns was a modification of Napoleonic methods adapted to the conditions created by the modern instruments and weapons at his disposal. These modifications arose not so much out of the new means of transport and communication as out of the increase in firepower. The strengthening of the firepower of the infantry had given the defense such an advantage that Moltke had to recognize that it could no longer be overcome by bravery alone. Wherever the enemy could be enticed into attacking, Moltke was inclined to exploit the advantages of the defense before launching a counterattack. Where that was not possible, however, he sought to offset the firepower of his opponent by concentrating superior firepower and general tactical pressure by a converging attack on front and flank. As such an outflanking movement executed within sight of the enemy forewarned the latter, the best method for bringing about such convergent action was by means of directing separate forces simultaneously against the flank and front of the enemy. The increased defensive strength of these separate forces safeguarded them against being overwhelmed, and the fully developed staff system and means of communication ensured their effective cooperation (coordination). Moreover the increase in the strength of the defense, making the annihilation of the opponent by pursuit *after the battle* more difficult, by itself forced the commander to seek as complete a victory as possible *on the field of battle itself*; thus inclining him towards the more dangerous but more promising converging attack instead of a mere frontal encounter. At the same time, the difficulty of swiftly achieving a decisive victory made for the increased significance of the "exterior lines," and tended to vitiate the advantage which "interior lines" had conferred in the Napoleonic campaigns. Where Napoleon had been able to act on the assumption that an army of 100,000 men—particularly under his leadership—in the midst of two others of 60,000 each, could successively defeat and destroy them in detail, by the time of Moltke the probability had become that it would be caught and defeated between the two, before it could have eliminated either of them.

These considerations in the purely operational sphere were still further reinforced by considerations of marching technique which made the placing of more than an army corps on any single road undesirable as well as by strategic necessities, which as in 1866 demanded a widely extended initial disposition in order to be able to cover any line of hostile advance. In this as well as in all similar cases, instead of uniting all his forces as Napoleon prescribed, Moltke preferred to let them advance in the general direction of the enemy, counting upon his skill in bringing them together on the field of battle itself.

The essential in Moltke's strategy, however, lies not in the advance from widely different fronts, as has been erroneously attributed to his most famous campaign in Bohemia in 1866, nor in any other form or method but in the sovereign calm with which he let the situation approach him, the freedom from all preconceived ideas with which he met every situation on its own merits, and the elasticity and resourcefulness with which he applied the proper expedient to it. Not that he was free from errors, of commission as well as of omission, or that behind his impassive quiet profound anxiety did not at times assail him, as before Königgrätz. But with iron self control he overcame the errors of his own judgment and with imperturbable calm rearranged his plans when they were frustrated by the inadequate understanding of his subordinates.

For the greatest weakness in Moltke's strategy lay in the greatly increased difficulty of coordinating the separate armies. The still very imperfect means of communication, coupled with the fact that he was merely chief of staff, not commander in chief, caused Moltke to keep the reins loose, particularly when dealing with princely commanders and their ambitious chiefs of staffs like Blumenthal. In 1866 Moltke had therefore to be satisfied with issuing general directives, outlining the objectives to be aimed at and leaving the commanders to choose for themselves the ways and means for achieving them. As a result of the difficulties encountered then he endeavored to hold the reins more firmly in 1870-71, intervening into the decisions of the army chiefs by issuing orders direct to corps commanders and, as at Gravelotte, reserving for the High Command the disposition of entire corps.³

These sad experiences induced him—after 1871 to concentrate

³It is interesting to note that when the official history of the war was written in the historical section of the General Staff, Moltke expressed his dissatisfaction that the role of the High Command in that battle had not been brought out sufficiently but refused to have the passage altered.

his main effort upon the training of the officers of the General Staff for the direction of large forces under modern conditions. Through an unending series of tactical lessons, war games, and staff rides he endeavored to develop a homogeneity of judgment based, not on the rigid standard of a preconceived doctrine, but on the uniform habit of judging each situation exclusively on its own intrinsic merits. Despite the trouble it had caused him at times, Moltke was loath to curtail the independence of the local commander, or of his chief of staff. But at the same time he strove to train them to view their own particular problems and solutions within the larger framework of the general situation as a whole. It was not necessary that everyone should strike the decisive blow, but a commander imbued with the right spirit and understanding, might by sacrificing himself ensure victory at the decisive point. As the growing intricacy of modern warfare made personal acquaintance with General Staff methods almost indispensable to the commander, the General Staff became the normal road of access to the higher ranks in the military hierarchy. Now and then an exceptionally able line officer like von Kluck might rise to the command of an army without having passed through either the War Academy or General Staff; but these exceptions were rare. The normal course was for the officer to go through the various stages of the Staff career and then to pass on to the higher ranks of leadership proper, the command of a brigade, a division, a corps and, in exceptional cases, to one of the great inspectorships carrying with them the designation as army commander in case of war.

The second great task of Moltke's later days was the preparation of strategic plans to meet the ever increasing menace of a war on two fronts against a rejuvenated France in the West and Russia in the East. As early as April 1871 in the full flush of victory Moltke had envisaged such a contingency. At that time he felt strong enough to meet it by simultaneous offensives in the East and in the West. Later his plans changed almost from year to year in accordance with the rapid shifts in the political scene. From 1879 onwards, however, the alienation of Russia and the alliance with Austria cleared the scene sufficiently to make possible a stabilization of his strategic plans for almost a decade. The increasing strength of the French fortress system caused Moltke to give up the idea of an offensive in the West as no longer practical and to plan his offensive in the East, where the slowness of the Russian mobilization held out good prospect

of achieving a decisive success in collaboration with the Austrian forces. Devoting at first one half, later as much as two thirds of the forces at his disposal to the defense in the West, he proposed to advance with the rest of his forces from the Vistula against the lower Narew, there to join hands with the Austrians who would attack northwards from Galicia. Once a signal success was achieved in Central Poland, Moltke intended to halt the advance there and transfer most of his forces for an offensive in full strength in the West.

These two main concerns of Moltke's latter days: the training of the General Staff for the direction of modern mass armies and the preparation for a war on two fronts against a numerically superior Franco-Russian combination, were to dominate the life-work of Schlieffen (1891-1906) who, after the brief episode of the brilliant intriguer Waldersee (1888-1891), became Moltke's real heir and successor.

IX

Deeply imbued with the excellence of Moltke's teachings, Schlieffen saw his most important task in the training of his General Staff in their intelligent application to the greatly increased forces and their infinitely more complicated problems of co-ordination and direction.

As the sources of error and misunderstanding in directing modern war increased, the control of the leader had to become surer. So Schlieffen in countless tactical exercises, war games, staff rides, and maneuvers strove with an intensity far surpassing Moltke's to train his officers in the fullest exploitation of the varying situations put before them. He hammered into them what he called the *Vernichtungsville*, the determination not to rest satisfied with an easy success, leaving the enemy intact to fight another day, but to eliminate him once and for all from the strategic board. Decisive victories in the day of ever increasing firepower could no longer be hoped for from mere frontal encounters. Even Moltke's converging attack on front and flank was not decisive enough. In order to ensure the annihilation of the opponent, the best, the only certain method, in these days of mass armies with their almost impenetrable fronts was to direct one's attack from the outset upon the enemy's highly vulnerable and sensitive flanks and lines of communication, that famous "attack in flank and rear" in which he eventually came to see "the whole essence of the history of warfare."

In view of the position of Germany between the Franco-Russian combination, Schlieffen became convinced that the only prospect of success lay in the possibility of inflicting a swift decisive defeat upon one opponent first and then turning against the other. In the choice of the opponent to be eliminated in the first round he differed from Moltke, deciding soon after his appointment as Chief of the General Staff that the improvements in the Russian railway net made the chance of striking a swift decisive blow at Russia almost illusory. The prospect of becoming embogged in an endless war of attrition in the immense Russian territory frightened him. At the same time a keen appreciation of the value of the initiative led him to take a far more serious view of the dangers of a French offensive in the West than either Moltke or Waldersee had done.

From 1892 onwards, therefore, he began to shift his plan for the initial offensive to the West. Here, however, the chances of achieving a swift decisive success appeared hardly better than in the East. If the French remained behind their fortifications, he saw no possibility of inflicting upon them a decisive defeat before the pressure of the Russians exerted itself. If, on the other hand, the French attacked him simultaneously in Lorraine and through Luxemburg in Belgium, Schlieffen would find himself in a well-nigh hopeless position, without the necessary space for a counter operation on "interior lines," with which Moltke had devised to meet that contingency.

In this situation Schlieffen saw only one way of striking a blow which would be decisive, whatever course his adversaries might take: by striking at them across the barrier of neutral states interposed between Germany and France. He was far from blind to the moral implications and the hazards of this disastrous decision, which was destined in the end to undo his whole lifework; but the inexorable logic of his strategic reasoning drove him step by step along this fatal path. In the earlier phases of this plan (1894-1904) one half of his forces was to pin down the French by an attack in Lorraine, while the other, wheeling through Luxemburg and South Belgium was to take them in the rear. But this plan had the vital defect that it left the German forces divided on both sides of a French position, based upon strong permanent fortifications, thus offering the French a chance to destroy each of its parts in detail. To remedy that defect Schlieffen in 1905 came to the radical solution still further elaborated in the memorandum which he left to his successor, the younger Moltke:

of enveloping the French from the North, not with half, but practically the whole of his forces, in order to force them to accept battle in the rear of their fortress line, and if victorious, drive them from North and West against the Swiss border.

X

It remains to examine in retrospect what had become, in the hands of the leaders of the General Staff, of the revolution wrought in the conduct of campaigns by the genius of Napoleon.

Napoleon had developed his "operational strategy" in order to increase the tactical success by placing the enemy from the beginning in an unfavorable position. In contrast to the maneuver strategy of the 18th Century his operations were *always* meant to lead up to the tactical decision, battle. That tactical encounter, however, remained a completely independent element. The main lines of the battle itself were in no way prescribed in advance by the operation that brought it about. The battle was decided by tactical means, frequently by enveloping one wing of the enemy and striking at it simultaneously in front. When tactical success had been achieved it was consummated by a relentless operational pursuit. In the planning of his operations Napoleon aimed in principle to encompass the entire theater of war. In practice the inadequate road net and communications of his age forced him to keep his forces concentrated on a single line of advance, sometimes an "inner line" (1796, 1805, 1809, 1813, 1814, 1815), sometimes an "outer line" (1800, 1806).

In contrast Moltke's development of his strategy was characterized by the far looser disposition of his forces made possible by greater defensive strength, better roads and means of coordination. This is the case both in the original strategic disposition as well as in the actual conduct of battle. As with Napoleon, operation and battle were still clearly separate entities. But owing to the increased firepower of the defense, Moltke aimed at the decision of battle by operational rather than tactical means proper. Within the larger operation, determining the general movement of his armies, we find a separate minor operation aiming at the overwhelming of the enemy by the converging action of separate forces or even by complete encirclement, in which the actual tactical encounter was clearly predetermined in advance and served merely to confirm the decision already achieved by the operational form.

Thus in 1866 we find Moltke's major operational idea, the con-

centration of the widely dispersed Prussian Armies in Northern Bohemia with the prospect of an operation on the "inner lines" between the Saxon Army reenforced by some Austrian Corps to the North and the bulk of the Austrian forces, whom he erroneously believed still around Brünn, in the South. When Moltke realized his error, he deliberately kept the second army under the Crown Prince at arm's length instead of letting it close up, and thus by its direction into the right flank of the Austrians at Königgrätz decided that battle. Similarly, before Sedan within his main operation meant to head off the French Army under MacMahon to the North and press it against the Belgian border, he developed a kind of minor operation by splitting his two closely concentrated armies in order to bring about the complete encirclement of Sedan. In all this Moltke, even more than Napoleon, recognized the enemy's will as a factor to be respected. His whole elastic "strategy of expedients" was nothing but the constant adaptation of his intentions to the moves of his opponent—interweaving the two into a strategic web in which from time to time a tactical decision created a new point of departure for new plans and decisions.

Schlieffen, starting from that concept, found himself carried away no less by his desire for the "absolute victory" than by the demands of his incomparably more difficult position into a one-sided intensification of Moltke's strategy. Striving, unlike Moltke, no longer for a reasonable average, but an optimum, he no longer felt in a position to concede his opponent any opportunity to make his will felt. Even on the defensive, even against overwhelmingly superior odds, he was determined not to surrender the initiative.

With the increasing difficulty of achieving that shattering attack against the enemy's flank and rear upon which he relied, Schlieffen saw himself forced to stress his strategy of annihilation until it finally reached the point of attempting the complete destruction of the enemy's forces in one gigantic operation. By the encirclement of the Schlieffen plan, he not only hoped to achieve that decisive blow in flank and rear but to deprive his opponents in advance of any power to develop their initiative, of any possibility of staging an effective riposte.

By extending the sweep of his right wing to the extreme limits of the space available—"if you march into France," he is stated to have said in his last years, "see to it that the man on the utmost right brushes the Channel Coast with his sleeve,"—he intended

to crush any possible counteraction in advance. Control of the entire field was meant to enable him to envelop his opponent wherever he might be, wherever he might try to go; depriving him from the outset of all liberty of action; catching him in an operative net, into which all his struggles to free himself would only serve to enmesh him deeper. To that end mere operative superiority was not enough. From the outset it was necessary to concentrate on the decisive right wing so powerful a mass of reserves that, whatever the demands made upon it in the course of the struggle it could always maintain its superiority.

In thus shaping his plan so as to dispose in advance of any possible hostile counteraction, Schlieffen endeavored to fuse mobilization, operations, and tactical decisions into one single grandiose scheme, in which these hitherto clearly separated elements lost their separate identity. Battles became mere subordinate incidents in a total campaign in which only the whole counted; and even the basic difference between operational movement and tactical action became hopelessly blurred.

Thus in the gigantic conception of the Schlieffen Plan of 1905, the idea of "operational strategy," of deciding the campaigns essentially through the preliminary operation, first realized by Napoleon, reached its final apogee. Schlieffen no longer aimed merely at the preparation of the tactical decision by maneuvering the opponent into an unfavorable position, but at the total elimination of the enemy's independent will and action, forcing him from the outset into a hopeless situation.

xi

Small wonder that the demoniac "will to victory" revealed in Schlieffen's plan, appeared to many of his contemporaries as a fantastic overstress of Moltke's more modest and balanced methods. While his own pupils followed Schlieffen with enthusiastic admiration, the mass of the older generals, at their head Field Marshal Haeseler, the greatest figure in the German Army next to Schlieffen himself, did not disguise their apprehension at this "paper strategy."

"You cannot carry away the armed strength of a great power like a cat in a bag," Haeseler is reported to have exclaimed during the advance in France in August 1914. Above all, Schlieffen's successor and executor of his plan, the younger Moltke, completely lacked that confidence in it which alone might have carried so perilous an undertaking to success. The exact intention of the

modifications which he introduced into it during his tenure of the direction of the General Staff and his plans in August 1914 has been discussed with greater vehemence than any other issue in the history of the First World War without receiving any final clarification. It seems that they affected not only the distribution of the forces, but the central idea itself, substituting for the one huge, concentrated, and irresistible blow planned by Schlieffen, a number of independent actions, which he expected on the Franco-Belgian border, (*Greuzschlachten*) maintaining the outward forms of the plan merely as a means for bringing these actions about and carrying through their strategic exploitation.

The breakdown of this plan in Moltke's hand led to the war in the trenches in the West and to the complete arrest, for nearly four years, of any form of operational strategy. In the East the width of the Russian territory together with the marked superiority of German leadership in mobile strategy enabled them to achieve a number of partial battles of annihilation along the lines laid down by Schlieffen (Tannenberg, Battle of the Masurian Lakes). But here too the ever-increasing strength of the defensive tied down all action to mere frontal moves leading to the pressing back, but not to the annihilation of the enemy.

It was only with the reestablishment of operational mobility in 1939 that the ideas of Schlieffen came to full realization. The cutting up and encirclement of the Polish armies and the great break-through in the West leading to the elimination of the northern group of Allied armies were classical examples of that strategy.

It was only in the following year in Russia that this strategy met an opponent able to employ almost limitless space for evasive maneuver and almost unlimited resources in manpower, who deliberately aimed at letting German strategy of the absolute destroy itself through its own overstrain.

Chapter Four

THE WORLD WAR

I

To those who did not experience it themselves, it is almost impossible to convey what the First World War meant to the German people.

No one who witnessed it will forget the first outburst in August 1914. Propaganda for actual war had nothing to do with it. The crisis had come far too quickly to leave any time for psychological preparation, and no amount of preparation could have achieved it. It was something without parallel in German history. Spontaneously the 67,000,000 Germans rose as one man. The enthusiasm swept aside all differences of political creed, class, religion, age. For a very short period the German nation experienced a complete unity such as it had never known before.

Without that unity the German nation would never have found the strength to hold out so long against the overwhelming coalition against it or to withstand the strain to which it was subjected both at home and in the trenches. From the point of view of internal unity and general morale nothing, therefore, could have been more fatal in the long run than the perversion of the original impulse by the fantastic war aims which, in the name of "indemnity" and of "indispensable guarantees" sprang up on all sides with the first great success. The weak Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg failed to realize the vital necessity of taking from the beginning a clear stand against these excesses, the absurdity and unreality of which form one of the most painful pages in Germany's war record. His own statements on this vital point remained vague and noncommittal, and the suppression of all public discussion of "war aims" in the press and in meetings, which was maintained more or less until the summer of 1917, merely left the field open to intensive underground propaganda organized by interested groups. The result was that the German nation, which had entered the war with no other idea than to defend itself, was thrown into confusion, divided up

between the annexationists and the adherents of a "peace of mutual understanding"; the belief of the men in the trenches in the necessity of their struggle was undermined and the ground prepared for the final psychological collapse in the autumn of 1918.

The spirit of unquestioning devotion in which the mass of the German people began the war was also reflected in the hope, common in the thoughtful minority of all classes, of a spiritual rebirth of the nation. To those who before the war had been deeply perturbed by the gradual "despiritualization" of German life the first enthusiasm seemed to hold out the promise that what had depressed them for so long would disappear and the old idealistic spirit would be reborn and recreate a new state and a new nation after the victory. This dream of a new and better Germany was strongest among the "volunteers," and particularly the students. It is in the letters and writings of students who died in Flanders and Poland, in their sober realism, in their faith in the spiritual heritage of the nation, not in the hysterical outbursts of the press, that we can feel what the war really meant to the German nation. Of all the losses that befell her the loss of those young men, who should have been her future leaders, was the greatest.

II

However much Germany may have been unprepared economically and politically for a four years' war, the work of the general staff had lost none of its former excellence. The officer in charge of mobilization plans, who for five days and nights remained at his post in the Ministry of War to answer any questions that might arise, records that it proceeded without a hitch and without a single inquiry. With clockwork precision the bulk of the German forces concentrated on the western border to break through Belgium against the weakly protected north-eastern front of France.

The plan, according to which they were directed by the chief of the general staff, the younger Moltke, from the Imperial Headquarters at Luxemburg,¹ was still based upon the famous Schlieffen Plan, but the alterations to which it had been subjected at the hands of his weaker successor had profoundly affected its fundamental idea and endangered the chances of its success. Whereas Schlieffen, as we have seen, had massed his

¹The "Oberste Heeres Leitung" or Supreme Command, normally abbreviated as "OHL."

reserves in an overwhelming block on the decisive right wing, allotting to it seven-eighths of the total strength, Moltke abandoned the simplicity of this scheme owing to fear of a strong French attack in Alsace-Lorraine. At the same time in the hope of inflicting a severe and immediate defeat upon the French right, he had strengthened his left wing at the expense of his right so as to reduce their relation of strength to not more than 1:3 thus seriously jeopardizing the success of the whole.

No other issue in the World War has called forth in Germany such a flood of ink as this "watering-down" of the Schlieffen Plan. Schlieffen's adherents protest that if his original plan had only been carried out Germany could not have failed to win the war. Their opponents, among them Ludendorff, who as head of the operations section in the years during which these decisive alterations were adopted bears a considerable share in the responsibility for them, claim that in view of the increase in the French forces the original plan was no longer feasible without danger of a defeat on the left, before the enveloping right could have made its pressure felt effectively.

Both these contentions seem—from opposing angles—to miss the real issue by taking too narrow a view of what Schlieffen meant by his plan. His successors took it in precisely the sense which he would have rejected, as an infallible "recipe of victory" instead of a solution of a situation in need of constant reconsideration. They attributed to it an absolute value regardless of circumstances, and they clung to it, even after their "adjustment" had deprived it of that utmost concentration of purpose which constituted its fundamental essence. It would have been more in the spirit of Schlieffen if Moltke had either decided that the changes were after all not so grave as to preclude its success in the original form and had proceeded to carry it out in the letter and the spirit; or else, if he had decided, feeling that the situation made such a course no longer possible, to throw the whole plan over and substitute an entirely new one, equally as clear and equally as single-minded as the Schlieffen Plan.

Instead, Moltke took his middle course—with results we all know. Yet, so brilliant had been Schlieffen's conception, and so remarkably did the French play into its hands, that even in this emasculated form it came close to success. There was a series of mistakes on the part of different army commanders; they failed on the right wing to utilize the opportunity of destroying their opponents in detail; they prematurely exhausted their forces in

a purposeless counterattack on the left; there was a fatal lack of contact between the OHL and the right wing, which a stronger man than the sick Moltke might have overcome. If it had not been for these mistakes, the French, completely surprised and outmaneuvered by the march of the German right wing through Belgium and by the extent and strength of the German attack, might well have succumbed. As it was, at the critical moment, when the forces of the right German wing met the French and British counter-offensive, they were exhausted by six weeks of continuous advance and were weakened by the investment of the Belgian and French fortresses in their rear and by the injudicious withdrawal of two corps to Eastern Prussia from their reserves instead of from the left wing. They lacked the firm direction from above that alone could have given them the unity and determination necessary to overcome the crisis and they received instead from Moltke's emissary Hentsch, sent out with half-hearted and conflicting instruction, the order to retreat.

The full significance of this breakdown of the German advance on the Marne was not and could not be realized at the moment by anybody in either camp. Looking back over four weary years of deadlock on the Western Front, we smile today when we read how, among the Allies, Berthelot and Henry Wilson a few days later were discussing whether they would cross the German frontier within three or four weeks. Yet the very absurdity of that discussion can help us to distinguish—what is unfortunately so often overlooked—between the *immediate significance* of the breakdown of the Schlieffen Plan itself and the far deeper *consequences* that were soon to develop out of it.

The Schlieffen Plan in the eyes of its author had been the attempt to decide the war in that mobile form of warfare which, for well on a hundred years, had constituted the special preserve of the Prusso-German army. Its breakdown did not necessarily imply the renunciation of that mobile form altogether. Schlieffen himself would certainly not have hesitated a moment to substitute a new "expedient" for the plan that had miscarried; and, if General von Falkenhayn, the Prussian Minister of War who replaced the broken-down Moltke, had persisted in his first impulse to resume the offensive, he might still have brought the war to a successful end on the Western Front in the autumn of 1914. But the German command was now to reap the consequences of that fatal narrowing down of the Schlieffen Plan into an infallible panacea in the stunned perplexity in which its break-

down left the German staff officers. On the following morning, Falkenhayn, under the influence of Tappen, head of the operations section, threw over his original plan and resolved to stand upon the defensive. And there was nobody, either then or in the following weeks, when his resolve might still have been shaken, to point out to him the gravity of that fatal decision and press the absolutely vital necessity of maintaining at all cost that mobility of operations upon which the German Army's chance to assert its superiority rested.

The deadlock in the trenches, which was the result of Falkenhayn's decision, destroyed the immense advantage in training and leadership with which the German Army had entered the war and made a speedy victory in the old style impossible. It gave the Allies time to bring their overwhelming reserves of manpower and material to bear upon the German forces, exhausting them, until their last belated effort to regain in 1918 the mobility which they had renounced in 1914 ended in their collapse. Thus, if on September 9, 1914, the German command suffered a signal setback through the breakdown of its famous plan of campaign, it is the 15th of that month, the morning on which Flakenhayn decided against a return to the mobile strategy of the first weeks, *that must be considered to be the real turning point of the war.*²

The vital importance of the change was somewhat disguised by the success which their mobile form of strategy was still able to achieve throughout the war on the Eastern Front. There, the inferiority of the Russians owing to inadequate organization, mobility, and equipment, and the lucky chance that allowed the Germans to decipher until 1916 the wireless messages of the Russian staff, enabled the Germans to run risks they could never have dared to take in other circumstances. It enabled them to break the spell of static warfare, regain strategical mobility, and exploit their superiority in open warfare over their ably led, but clumsy opponents, and to achieve, if not a decisive knockout, at least considerable success, whenever they decided to concentrate their efforts on that front. The superiority of German strategic training in open warfare asserted itself particularly in the two

²This was the opinion of old Field Marshal Haeseler, one of the outstanding personalities of the pre-war army. When asked in the summer of 1916 by one of his former officers whether he would have thought that the war in the trenches would determine the character of the war to such an extent, he exclaimed with violence "No, and it should never have come to this, if we had not been led with such deplorable incompetence. We ought to have waged and decided the war in the style of 1870, not with one Vionville, but with ten Vionvilles" Because he realized what the loss of strategic mobility upon the Western Front meant to Germany, Haeseler expressed himself strongly in favor of terminating the war as soon as possible, in contrast to the vast majority of the active commanders, amongst whom only Groener, the head of the German Staffs Railway Department, seems to have shown similar insight.

whirlwind campaigns by which, in the autumns of 1915 and 1916, the armies, first of Serbia and later of Rumania, were swept away and almost eliminated.

III

It was in this mobile warfare on the Eastern Front, permitting still such sensational victories in the old style as the battles of Tannenberg, the Masurian lakes, and Lodz, that the two men arose upon whom, as the war dragged on, the German nation was to concentrate all its devotion, its hopes, and its faith: Hindenburg and Ludendorff. United throughout the war far more closely than is usual in the relationship between commander and chief of staff, the two men presented in many respects a striking contrast. Hindenburg was a typical representative of the old type of Prussian officer; his convictions were few but deeply rooted; a confirmed monarchist, a devout Christian, he was moved less by ambition than by the idea of "doing his duty." He had had a distinguished career in the General Staff and as a teacher at the Military Academy, which in peace time had brought him to the highest rank normally accessible in the German Army, the command of an army corps. He was essentially "unintellectual," if compared with men like Moltke or Schlieffen, with the tastes and outlook of a country gentleman rather than those of a "man of the world." His quiet steadiness of nature was impressive, but beneath it he was a weak man, easily yielding to the influence of his surroundings.

Ludendorff was the first outstanding representative of a hitherto unknown type of Prussian officer, the product of the irruption of the new "realistic" trend in German life into the ranks of the army, still clinging with a blind pathetic faith to the outer forms of the Prussian officer's traditions in which he had been brought up, yet completely without any feeling for their real aristocratic spirit. He was a plebeian to the bone both in his qualities and in his defects, a man of burning ambition and tremendous will power, a blind believer in "efficiency," who had made his way by his own unaided effort, not so much through exceptional brilliancy as by sheer energy and drive. With an intellect of great power as far as mere capacity for work and grasp of detail was concerned, but no great spirit, he had a curiously narrow, one-track mind without depth or subtlety. He was a man of iron principles, "inelastic in his emotional life," without the slightest touch of humor or of self-criticism to relieve the

almost intolerable arrogance of his complacency; ready to cast overboard all his conviction, his monarchism, his Christianity, even his respect for the Prussian officer's sense of honor, as soon as they seemed to conflict with his aims. "I go my way," was his characteristic remark.

In the war, the battles of Tannenberg and Lodz early earned him the reputation of the best man of the German side, and of "Schlieffen's most brilliant disciple." The first claim has not remained uncontested; the second completely distorts his real significance. No more profound contrast is conceivable than that between Schlieffen's superior spirit, his cool, sarcastic, penetrating intellect, the elegance of his literary and strategic style, and Ludendorff's blind fanaticism, primitive outlook, his coarseness of thought and action and massive materialism. That is why Ludendorff, grasping the outer form of Schlieffen's ideas well enough to execute them brilliantly in the mobile warfare for which they had been developed, failed completely to realize the necessity for their radical revision and adaptation when conditions were fundamentally changed. In consequence, towards the end of the war he relapsed more and more into a "hand to mouth" strategy without any clear plan or method. With him, the great tradition of German strategic thought from Scharnhorst to Schlieffen broke down completely, to be revived again after the war by Groener and Seeckt.

For Germany it was one of the tragic misfortunes of the war that when in August 1916 Hindenburg and Ludendorff took over the supreme command from Falkenhayn, discredited by his failure at Verdun, the breakdown of her system of the supreme direction of war threw not only the military but also increasingly the political direction of the war into the hands of this soldier, who had no understanding or sympathy for the civilian's outlook. Nominally, the system of the Kaiser as commander in chief, the Chancellor as his political, and the chief of General Staff as his strategic adviser, was re-established and outwardly maintained throughout the war. In reality the personalities of the chief actors deprived it from the beginning of its former significance and in the latter part of the war transformed it into a travesty.

The Kaiser was an amateur strategist, not a professional soldier like his grandfather, but he had the wisdom and the self-control, remarkable considering his temperament, to refrain from all intervention in the strategic direction of operations. By re-

nouncing this ultimate control, which in his grandfather's hands had made "the supreme command" something more than a fiction, he deprived the system of that supreme authority without which the balance between the political and the military direction of the war could not be maintained. The Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, a conscientious, melancholy bureaucrat, was neither a politician nor a statesman, least of all a diplomat. Acutely conscious of his incompetence in military matters, without the Kaiser's backing, he proved himself incapable of conducting the war or of maintaining his authority against the military and naval authorities who attacked him violently. Under Falkenhayn, although he confessed that he felt himself "worlds apart from the Chancellor," a precarious equilibrium was still maintained, but after Falkenhayn's fall and the accession of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, the internal balance of power swung over decisively to the side of the soldiers. Backed by the immense prestige which came to them after the battle of Tannenberg and even more by the hopes of the whole nation, Hindenburg and Ludendorff began more and more to enforce their demands on the civilian authorities, breaking all resistance by the threat of their resignation. The result of this remarkable interpretation of OHL's responsibility for the "successful conduct of the war" was the erection of a military dictatorship completely dominating the civilian authorities and practically reducing the Kaiser to impotence. It made the dictators' protestations of respectful obedience sound like hollow mockery.

Ludendorff and his supporters maintained after the war that he would never have meddled with politics and added to his tremendous burden if the absence of a firm hand in the government had not made his intervention imperative. The excuse contains only half the truth. It is true that by the summer of 1916 the "inner front" in Germany was a source of weakness and a cause for apprehension. As the war dragged on and the lack of a strong leadership became more and more apparent, the weaknesses in Germany's inner structure reappeared. The old antagonism between Right and Left broke out again over the new

⁸Or rather Ludendorff through Hindenburg, who confined himself more and more to backing with his authority his chief of staff and leaving him to deal with the actual conduct of affairs. The inconsistency of the curious system by which the chief of the general staff fulfilled nominally the functions of chief of staff to the Emperor, actually those of commander-in-chief—though the fiction that he had no independent power of command was carefully maintained—was exposed when Hindenburg took over that post and there arose the problem of finding an appropriate position for the chief of staff to the chief of staff; the solution of appointing Ludendorff second chief of the general staff was finally dropped in favor of appointing him First Quartermaster-General, but with the significant rider added at his own request "with full share in the responsibility."

issues of "war aims" and the struggle for "unrestricted submarine warfare" which Bethmann-Hollweg's weakness had allowed to become a subject of public discussion. The Reichstag, rising in importance but unfortunately not in statesmanship as the authority of the Chancellor declined, became once more the scene of party squabbles and intrigues. The situation demanded a hand of iron, but also a velvet glove and an elastic wrist.

The manner in which Ludendorff attempted to remedy this lack of unity only made matters worse. His interference, indirect and intermittent, destroyed the authority of the successive chancellors, without substituting any other for it. The blind intransigence with which he began to apply his military notions of "command and obey" to politics was to prove even worse than Bethmann-Hollweg's pedantic and vacillating indecision. The violence with which he forced the civilian authorities to carry through, against their objections, the great Hindenburg Program of 1916 for the systematic mobilization of the country's manpower and material resources, merely served in the end to defeat its own objective. His authoritarian outlook led him to oppose the most necessary internal reforms, such as the expansion of Prussian suffrage, and helped to stiffen the resistance of the reactionaries. His contempt for all political "subtleties" led him to press upon the successive chancellors one ill-advised measure after the other, from the declaration of Polish independence to the unrestricted submarine campaign and the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. In fact, looking back upon the political activity of the OHL, it is hardly possible to point to a single instance in which its interference in German internal or foreign policy did not end by bringing about the opposite of what it meant to achieve.

III

The decisive position which Ludendorff acquired in the German military and political system in 1917-18 was only the final stage in the excessive influence which the "general staff system" gained during the war in the direction of the German army. This increase in the General Staff's importance was not peculiar to the German army; it was the inevitable result of the change from mobile to static warfare. As the necessity for quick decisions decreased and the amount of administrative staff work increased in trench warfare, in all armies the commander's functions inevitably dwindled and his staff officers' importance increased. What made this universal development so particularly

conspicuous and vicious in the German army was that, coming on the top of the extraordinary position and prestige already enjoyed by the General Staff, it led to a hypertrophy of the "general staff system," threatening in many cases to reduce the commanders to mere figure heads. This was particularly the case of the "corps commanders," who found themselves, through the dissolution of the peacetime army corps, deprived of their original functions and reduced to local administrators of a constantly fluctuating stream of divisions. The whole network of chiefs of staff were in daily telephonic communication with one another; the OHL with the chiefs of staff of the army groups and armies, and these in their turn with the chiefs of staff of their corps and divisional commanders. As a result, staff officers did not confine themselves to the exchange of information, but frequently exceeded their proper functions by taking decisions among themselves without troubling to consult their respective commanders or giving them an opportunity of expressing their opinions.

Owing to this underground system of communications between the members of the General Staff, there arose behind the official hierarchy of the commanders, another and illegitimate hierarchy, virtually controlling the direction of affairs by granting or withholding the reserves and munitions upon which any major action in trench warfare depended. The system opened to ambitious staff officers opportunities of procuring for themselves by underhand methods the means for undertaking unnecessary operations. In fact, there were times when general staff officers used this underground system of inter-staff communications to influence the higher authorities to decide against their own superiors' express wishes. The illegitimate influence of the chiefs of staff became recognized to such an extent that towards the end of the war failures were often followed by the removal of the staff officer, while the commander was left in his post.

This state of things tended to undermine not only the prestige of the commander but the entire conduct of affairs. The commanding officers were far more capable judges of their troops than their staff officers⁴. Their practical elimination therefore kept OHL and the army commands continually misinformed as to the real state of the troops, led to excessive demands on them until general exhaustion culminated in the final breakdown of 1918.

⁴An example of this is the difference of opinion at Verdun between the Crown Prince and his chief of staff, von Knobelsdorff. The Crown Prince, in touch with his troops and better acquainted with their sufferings, was in favor of breaking off a hopeless struggle; von Knobelsdorff was opposed to this for psychological and military reasons and persuaded Falkenhayn to carry on.

The final breakdown was the climax of the profound transformation which the German Army had undergone in the course of the war. The army that started on its last desperate assault in the west in March 1918 was a very different force from that which had set out four years earlier. That first onrush had produced gaps in the ranks which proved more and more irreparable. The enthusiasm of the volunteers could not make up for their lack of peacetime training. It was, however, when the German military authorities were forced to conscript the untrained masses that the military and moral value of the army as a whole declined alarmingly. This deterioration in quality was also particularly true of the officers. The regular officers exposed themselves at the beginning with unnecessary gallantry. They suffered so severely that ordinary regimental duties began to fall more and more on the shoulders of reserve officers, who by the end of the war were in command of most companies and not a few battalions. Most of them had been hastily trained in six weeks' courses; they could not, with the best will in the world, compare with the regular peacetime officers or even reserve officers. The vast expansion of the latter from 29,000 at the beginning to 226,000 at the end of the war, filled their ranks with men unfitted for the duties imposed upon them. The evil was intensified by the military authorities, who clung to their traditional ideas, and persisted in confining commissions to the ranks of the "*Einjährigen*," preferring to promote less suitable men from them rather than grant commissions to the many distinguished noncoms.⁵

The inevitable result was a decline in discipline as immature boys without personal authority were set over older married men. There was also indignation over the distribution of decorations and the difference in food between officers and men. All this gradually created a considerable amount of ill feeling, though it was felt less at the front than in the rear. These changes in the human material and internal cohesion of the German army were still further accentuated by the fundamental transformation that war itself had undergone. Trench warfare revolutionized the whole character of the struggle. Hitherto the war had been an intermittent series of short bursts of intensive fighting interspersed with long periods of marching or watching.

⁵By making the promotion "from the ranks" dependent upon the previous acquisition of the highest orders for personal bravery accessible in the various German contingents, the military authorities kept the number of such promotions during the war down to some 240, of which ninety were in the Bavarian army, a totally insignificant figure if compared with nearly 200,000 reserve officers promoted during the same period from the ranks of the "*Einjährigen*."

Now it was one continuous action, which kept the forces on both sides in perpetual contact and tension. It swelled up from time to time into a major action, but it never for a moment released the soldier from its circle of death and destruction.

This new form of war increased in terror as the power of the defense drove the attacker vainly to attempt to overwhelm the defense by sheer weight of material. Out of it was born by 1916 a new type of soldier, formed in a hell of fire and mud. In the "front fighter" with his steel helmet, bedraggled uniform, burning eyes, and drawn face, the "war of material" had found its personification. Imperturbable, toughened by the daily horror surrounding him, apathetic, resourceful, independent to the verge of insubordination, he was a man to whom war had become daily, bloody, hard work stripped of all the gay trappings that formerly concealed its worst horrors.

Before the machine gun the tactical forms of the old army had broken down long ago. In the battered, shell-plowed no-man's land between the trenches the deployment of whole companies and platoons in regular lines was unthinkable. Only by dispersing into small groups could men hope to survive. External discipline and mechanical fighting drill broke down. No longer under the watchful eye of the commanding officer, the individual had just his own moral strength to support him and his own judgment to guide him. The front fighter became essentially a "volunteer."

This was particularly the case with those in whom this new type of "front fighter" found its supreme expression, the "storm troops." These were squads of picked fighting men upon whom difficult and dangerous tasks devolved, which the mass of ordinary soldiers became more and more incapable of fulfilling. Amongst this *élite*, the "front fighters" par excellence, there were many who were moved by their devotion to duty. Most of them however, were men of a widely different stamp; men not only of indomitable spirit, but of an elementary fighting temperament, who found in the terrors of the "battle of material" their natural form of life. They were born fighters to whom danger became as the breath of life, who looked down with scorn upon the mass of mere soldiers with their "bourgeois" notions of security and of "fighting for their hearth and home." They were the men who after the war were to play a leading role in all the counter-revolutionary attempts in Germany and to pursue their "warrior's" creed, with true German thoroughness, to its utmost

nihilistic consequences.

These effects of trench warfare were common to all the armies engaged in it. What made the stress of the struggle harder for the German soldier, so that he broke down under it in the end, was his country's inferiority both in manpower and material. Inferiority in manpower meant longer periods in the trenches, shorter spells of recuperation in reserve, less, and shorter leave; insufficient nourishment, and inferiority in the weight and quality of munitions, meaning a far greater fraying of the nerves.⁶ In addition Falkenhayn's injudicious policy of ordering the infantry to hold the ground at all cost, huddling them together in one main line, cost the German infantry unnecessary losses as long as he remained in command. Ludendorff, on taking over the direction, immediately changed this rigid system of defense into a more elastic form, but the damage had already been done. The struggle before Verdun and on the Somme for the first time had severely shaken the German Army. The following year completed the work. Although the front had held despite the critical moments at Cambrai, at the end of 1917 the forces of the German army in the West were well-nigh exhausted; nor were the troops freed on the Eastern Front by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in a much better state. The German Army in its mass had sunk to the level of a militia of definitely limited fighting capacity.

The belief that the state of the German Army no longer made it possible to expose it indefinitely to similar attacks, but that it might still be able after careful reorganization and training to carry through one more great decisive attack, has been given by Ludendorff as one of the main reasons for his decision to stake all upon a last blow in the spring of 1918. Of all his actions this is probably the one which has been most severely criticized both at home and abroad. In reality it was nothing but a gambler's throw, in which the slight superiority in numbers he had been able to secure was to a large extent offset by the decrease in the mobility of his forces. He was without horses, which were as exhausted by undernourishment as the men, and without gasoline, while the iron tires with which a large number of motor-cars and trucks had had to be supplied in the absence of rubber, ground all roads to pieces within a short time. Moreover, Ludendorff lacked the single-mindedness demanded by Schlieffen. Failing to concentrate everything upon the first blow and to keep

⁶German artillery experts claim that owing to the lack of explosives German shells were both psychologically and materially far less effective than those of similar caliber on their opponents' side

that blow itself concentrated in one direction, he robbed himself of the chance of a decisive break-through which for a moment had seemed within his reach. When the first effect of surprise in his new system of attack had gone, the following actions had less and less chance to achieve their aim, until the last, the attack on both sides of Rheims on July 15, broke down with severe loss.

At that moment the war was definitely lost for Germany and the time had come to make peace on whatever conditions obtainable. Frank acceptance of that fact might still have saved something. But now Ludendorff's dogged stubbornness showed itself in its worst form. Refusing, like Napoleon at Waterloo, to admit himself beaten when all reasonable hope of averting defeat had gone, he vacillated during the following three months between unjustified opportunism and sudden bursts of acute dejection. In one of these outbursts, towards the end of September, he stamped the new Chancellor, Prince Max von Baden, into sending an appeal for an immediate armistice to President Wilson. He was disappointed by the answer and again became more hopeful of effective resistance. When he issued without the knowledge of the Chancellor an order exhorting the troops to fight on, he was promptly deprived of his post and replaced by Groener. Meanwhile in Germany the work of democratization proceeded at breakneck pace; popular demands of many years' standing were instantly conceded. But the effort to stabilize the inner front came too late. On November 4 the fleet mutinied at Kiel; during the following days the revolution spread like wildfire through Germany; on November 9 the last vestiges of government were overthrown in Berlin and the Republic was declared from the balcony of the Imperial Castle.

Chapter Five

WEIMAR REPUBLIC AND THIRD REICH

I

As the perspective with which we view the disastrous course of the German Army during the last quarter of a century widens, it becomes increasingly clear that the events of the first years or months of the Republic were of decisive importance in determining that course.

Today it is easier to realize the extent of that catastrophe and its shattering impression upon those most directly affected. The collapse of Germany in November 1918 was complete and absolute. It was not only a defeat such as German arms had not known except at Jena and Auerstadt; it was not only the overthrow of a political system that had existed as far back as conscious memory went and of a dynasty that had weathered the crises of more than five hundred years; it was also the signal for unloosing a flood of revolutionary violence that threatened to sweep away the very social and economic structure of the country. And it was the break-up of all military order and the disruption of the forces that had fought with such tenacity and stubbornness for over four years.

Not immediately so. Under the leadership of the OHL, which continued at its post, the troops marched back in perfect order to the Rhine, reaching and crossing it by a remarkable feat of staff work within the short period allowed by the Allies. Once home again, however, the bonds of discipline, long overstrained, broke down completely. Even units that had come back still firmly in the hands of their officers disintegrated in the general revolutionary atmosphere. The older classes simply went home for Christmas without waiting for any formal demobilization. The youngest were provisionally retained under colors, but proved so hopeless that they had to be disbanded in the following March.

In this atmosphere of universal disruption in which moderates and radicals struggled desperately with each other, the one to

reestablish order, the other to extend the revolutionary movement, Ebert, the head of the moderate faction in the revolutionary government turned as his last hope to the OHL. A secret telephone connected directly with the OHL in Kassel enabled him to keep in daily contact with Groener, while frequently the masses outside his study were clamoring for his blood.

Where, however, could reliable troops be found? A first and only attempt on Christmas Eve to clear the Imperial Castle in Berlin of Revolutionary Guards with some of the troops still nominally under arms, broke down ignominiously. A whole new basis had to be found if reliable forces were to be built up and the country preserved.

Consequently on January 9, 1919, the Revolutionary Government issued a formal proclamation calling for the creation of volunteer forces. All over Germany, enterprising leaders, mostly young officers, captains, lieutenants, even noncommissioned officers mobilized "Free Corps," differing widely in strength, discipline, military value, and training, but uniform in a close personal allegiance to their leaders, a deep distrust of all higher officers, and an almost fanatical hatred for the provisional government.

It is characteristic of the paradoxical state of affairs out of which the Weimar Republic arose that it was these counter-revolutionary forces which actually enabled the Ebert government to convoke the Constitutional Assembly in Weimar. Beginning with the old Hanse town of Bremen the "Free Corps," which reached a total of over 400,000 in May 1919, swept the entire Reich clear of revolutionary elements, established the authority of the Constitutional Assembly, and left behind local guards composed of conservative elements to assist the police in maintaining law and order.

Yet this alliance between the heirs of the Revolution and its most implacable enemies was too unnatural to outlast the acute crisis. Men like Groener and Reinhardt (the last Prussian Minister of War), who had loyally collaborated with the new revolutionary Minister of War, Noske, vainly endeavored to calm down the extremists and establish a basis of real understanding. The noncommissioned officers of the picked regiment stationed in Weimar to guard the Assembly, heatedly debated one evening whether or not they should hang the unpopular minister Erzberger.

This hardly concealed animosity of the forces for the revolutionary government broke out openly when the conditions of the Peace Treaty became known and the Cabinet, after a first outburst of indignation, appeared ready to accept the terms. The men were furious. The majority of the generals were in favor of open revolt, pointing out that if they did not act their troops would force them to do so. Even Reinhardt seriously discussed with Winnig, the Governor of East Prussia, a plan for setting up an independent state in the East and of trying to maintain it against the Allied and Polish forces. Largely, thanks to Groener, who in this terrible dilemma steadfastly refused to consider such acts of desperation, which could only end in the dismemberment of the Reich, reason prevailed and the outward semblances of order and discipline were restored.

But the temporary alliance between the soldiers and the Weimar Republic had received the death blow. The soldiers, who disregarding their hatred against the new regime had placed themselves at its service and had set it in the saddle, were furious at their betrayal. Out of this feeling of exasperation fanned by all kinds of national and personal grievances, there arose nine months later the famous Kapp Putsch of March 12, 1920. General von Lüttwitz, the head of the Berlin command, with the help of the Naval Brigade of Captain Ehrhardt, sought to overthrow the new government and replace it by a right-wing dictatorship under the leadership of Dr. Kapp, a high official of the East Prussian Administration.

The breakdown of this abortive putsch resulted in the elimination of the implacably hostile elements like Lüttwitz, but also of the two men, who so far had had the major share in the setting up of the new force and who, coming from opposite sides, had succeeded in finding a workable basis for collaboration: the socialist Minister of War, Noske, and the newly designated military head of the Reichswehr, (*Chef der Heeresleitung*), Reinhardt. Moreover, although the authority of the government had been restored, it was highly doubtful whether this had been as the result of its own strength and the general strike called out by its adherents, or through the refusal of the majority of the Reichswehr commanders to follow Lüttwitz. Thus, while in one sense the putsch served to relieve an almost intolerable situation, it left behind a legacy of bitterness and distrust that seemed almost impossible to surmount.

II

In this highly tense situation the leading officers of the Reichswehr and the Government turned simultaneously to the same man, General Hans von Seeckt.

Almost unknown to the general public, Seeckt was the outstanding personality among the leaders of the new Reichswehr. The son of a well known Prussian general, reared in the strictest tradition of that service, he had early distinguished himself not only by unusual ability, but a singular breadth of outlook and interest. A man of the world in the best sense of that term, adroit, self-possessed, skillful in the handling of men and affairs, with a deep appreciation of the beautiful in every form, literature, music, art, women, nature, he had found time in the intervals of an exceptionally rapid career to travel widely in Europe and Asia. The outbreak of the First World War found him as Chief of Staff to the Third Army Corps. In this position he so distinguished himself in an operation near Soissons that he was entrusted by Falkenhayn with the direction of the great strategic break-through at Gorlice in May 1915, as Chief of Staff to Mackensen. The success of that operation made his reputation and decided his fate for the rest of the war. For the exceptional mixture of strategic skill and diplomatic ability which he displayed during that campaign and even more conspicuously during the subsequent conquest of Serbia, made him by all odds the best choice as Chief of Staff for the coordination of effort between the Central Powers on the Eastern Front; first with various Austrian commanders, and finally as Chief of the Turkish General Staff until the collapse of that empire.

Returning to Berlin shortly after the outbreak of the Revolution, he first emerged some weeks later in a meeting of members of the General Staff so dramatic in its content and at the same time so highly symbolic for the whole subsequent development of the army, that his biographer, who was present, rightly has given to us a detailed account of it.¹ The meeting was opened by a certain Major von Schleicher, a protégé of Groener's, and one of the officers who had shown the greatest composure and versatility in the face of the wholly unprecedented situation. With characteristic nonchalance, Schleicher began by asserting that there was no need for resignation, following this with the outline of an extensive plan for the reconstitution of the country. Three

¹Rabenau, *Seeckt*, II, p. 117-118.

stages he claimed were necessary. First, the establishment of a government capable of exerting its authority. Then, when order had been restored, the reconsolidation of the economic life of the country. Only upon the foundation of such economic recovery would it be possible after long years of painful preparation to approach the reestablishment of the armed power of the country.

When he ended Seeckt arose. What he said was brief and not openly directed against Schleicher's program. But he made it quite clear that he was approaching the whole issue in a different spirit and from a different angle. The imperative need for the reestablishment of authority and order went without saying. But he was highly doubtful whether it would be possible to reconsolidate the economic life of a country that remained politically powerless. For a country temporarily bereft of the means to maintain an independent position in the world, there remained the duty to constitute the forces left to it at least in such a manner as to become a desirable ally for others. Germany had to be restored as quickly as possible to a position where it had something to offer in the field of political and military power. Speaking with a voice which his biographer described as "ice cold fire," Seeckt was hardly able to control his emotion. He threw out his words "like pieces of chopped lead."

With the reestablishment of some kind of order in the military organization, Seeckt was entrusted in rapid succession with a number of highly important tasks: organizer of the return of the Eastern Forces; chief military adviser to the peace delegation, last acting Chief of the General Staff, carrying through its dissolution and reconstitution in the new *Truppen-Amt* of which he became the head in November 1919 after Groener had vainly tried to induce Ebert to appoint him *Chef der Heeresleitung* in place of Reinhardt.

In the famous midnight meeting of March 13, 1920, in which Noske vainly advocated his plan for crushing the mutinous Ehrhardt Brigade by force, it was Seeckt who broke the silence with the words: "Soldiers do not shoot soldiers." When Noske accused him of sheltering the mutineers, he replied: "By no means, but I, and I perhaps alone, know the tragic consequence which any open struggle would inevitably entail. If Reichswehr clubs down Reichswehr, all feeling of comradeship in the officer's ranks is destroyed forever. If that should happen, the real catastrophe, prevented with so much effort on November 9, would finally have come to pass." Thereupon he went home and

next morning asked for his retirement. A few days later he found himself to his considerable astonishment back in the very center of responsibility.

Perhaps clearer than anyone else, Seeckt realized that nothing less than the existence of the new Reichswehr was at stake. For the moment an open split in the officer corps had been averted. But the putsch had revealed how deeply political dissension had already penetrated into the officer ranks. If the unity of the corps and the cohesion of the entire force were to be saved, the era of political adventures represented by the "Free Corps" must end. The Reichswehr must be completely withdrawn from the political arena, all fratricidal strife in its ranks put down with an iron hand as incompatible with the spirit of comradeship and the demands of discipline, all political interference from the outside prevented at all cost. In order to assure the Reichswehr a breathing spell in which to consolidate itself, Seeckt, was ready to make far-reaching compromises with the existing regime.

With all his energy Seeckt threw himself into the struggle. He saw with deep apprehension how little the great mass of officers realized the seriousness of the situation into which they had been placed by the irresponsible action of Lüttwitz and his adherents. "The officers corps of the Reichswehr finds itself in its critical hour," he warned. "Its attitude during the coming weeks and months will decide whether it is going to retain the leadership of the new army or not. . . . We are still in the midst of the strife, which the reconstitution of the political life of the country inevitably entails. We must help and collaborate. Recognition of this is still lacking in too many places. Instead I perceive wavering, unrest, and distrust. Yet—if the old bond of mutual confidence is not restored, I see no possibility of improvement."

Therefore in this hour of supreme crisis Seeckt appealed to the one emotional force that remained unshaken in the collapse of all that had formerly upheld the Old Army: the old tradition of unquestioning service, the "old spirit of silent, self-effacing devotion in the service of the Army which in this hour more dangerous than any before does not allow anyone to refuse his services to the common weal." Nevertheless, the struggle was long and bitter. Seeckt's policy and motives were violently assailed by the greater part of his old comrades. "At the head of the General Staff an officer of the Alexander regiment pays allegiance to democracy," noted General von Plessen in his diary a fortnight after the Kapp Putsch. In the same spirit Colonel Bauer, Ludendorff's

well-known collaborator, wrote, "What blind hatred can bring about, we see in General von Seeckt . . . in any case he is 'finished' for all those who still stick to the old concept of the officer."

To the mass of officers, Seeckt was still a comparatively unknown figure, and his cool, sarcastic manner did not add to his popularity. More than a year after he had assumed command, his *aidé de camp* found it necessary to beg him not to be so "icy" with his generals. Few at first realized the superior wisdom of his policy, and during the first year he met with widespread opposition that occasionally found open expression during his visits to the troops. The General Staff had not yet become the perfect instrument of control in his hands. Many of the generals did not like him and in their official correspondence some went to such extremes that he had sharply to rebuke them. But he persevered and won through.

As the appreciation of the crisis in which the officers' corps had found itself grew, the opposition began to waver and break down. "As for Seeckt, I am not yet clear about him," wrote Colonel Ludwig—at that time Chief of Staff of the old fortress Königsberg, later as head of the *Waffen-Amt* one of the main preparators of the rearmament and one of the last editors of the *Militär-Wochenblatt*. "It may be that you misjudge him. He certainly says some things differently from what he really thinks. But that is inevitable in times like these. Let's wait and see! The after effects of the Kapp Putsch he certainly has overcome very adroitly for the Reichswehr. At that moment we were on the brink of the precipice, and now we have an absolutely reliable force." And again, two months later he wrote: "I am no admirer of Seeckt, but after the Kapp Putsch he has undoubtedly saved much. The situation at that moment was more than doubtful—far more disagreeable than has been publicly realized."

Seeckt's own masterful personality, once the passionate feeling behind the ice-cool, sarcastic mask had been realized, contributed decisively to this change of attitude. His superiority as a political leader, as a military organizer, as an educator, above all as a brilliant strategist, was incontestable. As the fruit of his endeavors began to appear, the Reichswehr, welded again into a strictly-disciplined force, became a firm block held together by unquestioning obedience.

But Seeckt had not saved the Reichswehr for the Weimar Republic. His feelings towards the Republic were hardly more friendly than those of his bitterest opponents. If he stood a head

above his class in political realism and tactical skill, that did not mean that he was in any way less deeply rooted in its traditions—or prejudices. On the contrary! The world in which he belonged was the World of the Prussian officer in the strictest possible sense, the very essence of the spirit of the Old Army. It was the world of the Old Emperor, of Bismarck—whose fervid admirer he remained throughout his life—of Moltke, to whom he devoted the most penetrating and self-revealing of his studies. It was a world flanked on one side by the pillar of unquestioning belief in the absolute authority of the monarch which called forth from him sharp expressions of resentment when, towards the end of the First World War, Ludendorff pushed the Supreme Commander in Chief into the background and which in 1926 involved him in the episode with the Crown Prince's son leading to his resignation. On the other side it was flanked by an equally fervent belief in the traditions and excellence of the Old Army, in particular those of the General Staff: its implacable discipline, its cult of "service," "duty," and "responsibility" which demanded the absolute, self-effacing sacrifice of the individual where necessary. What came in between these two, was no less sharply profiled and accentuated. He felt a violent opposition against any kind of parliamentary regime, which he deemed an impossibility in a nation of theoretical dreamers like the Germans. An astonishingly intense Prussian particularism led him to prefer as Chancellor even a Bavarian particularist like Hertling rather than a democrat with unitarian tendencies. He had a pronounced leaning towards old-fashioned paternalism and local self-government, coupled with a strong aversion to any form or brand of socialism. Nothing about Seeckt is perhaps so remarkable as the total absence in his letters and writings of any reference to or appreciation of the remarkable achievements of the German labor movement. Finally, in striking contrast to all this was an intense interest in and acute feeling for everything beautiful: nature, art, music, literature; a breadth and liberality of outlook in all matters of the spirit, hard to reconcile with the narrowness of his political convictions.

To Seeckt the revolution of 1918 could be only an unmitigated disaster, and compromise with the Republic that had sprung out of it but a temporary truce in the battle to reorganize and restore the German nation. Even with his diplomatic gifts and the capacity for maintaining a mysterious silence that earned him the epithet "Sphinx," he was not able to conceal that opposition. As

far as possible he kept to his own sphere, avoiding all unnecessary contacts with the official world of the Republic. With all his political interests, Seeckt was not a particularly astute politician. His judgment of men was often remarkably at fault and he lacked both inclination and talent for intrigue. For that reason he was glad to leave the indispensable bargaining behind the scenes with political leaders and parties to the skillful hands of Schleicher, who was rapidly developing into the Reichswehr's specialist in underhanded political work. He never appeared in the Reichstag, leaving the official representation of the armed forces to the Minister of War, Gessler, whom he regarded as a convenient political screen and whom he irritated by his abrupt methods. As the leading military figure he was present at all important cabinet meetings; but he avoided attendance whenever possible or sat silent, his arms crossed over his breast. The frequent ministerial crises appeared senseless to him and undignified. For most of the new men, in particular for the trade union leaders, he had only a secret contempt. Perhaps the only one he really respected was shrewd old President Ebert. His authority he endeavored to strengthen wherever possible in the belief that he was serving his own interests by so doing and would reap the benefits later.

It seemed as if that hour had come when in 1923 the difficulties and dangers menacing the structure and existence of the Reich from all sides were such that the civilian authorities saw no way of coping with them and Ebert had to proclaim martial law and (for the time being) practically entrust Seeckt with the entire task of administering the country. For many weeks Seeckt debated with himself and his intimates whether and in what form to assume absolute power. One plan after the other was considered and discarded. In the end, after prolonged struggles, Seeckt decided to hand back the reins of power to the legitimate authorities, partly because he felt that he had not yet enlisted a sufficient personal backing, partly because he had convinced himself that the best way to carry through his plans was to obtain the presidency at the forthcoming elections of 1925-26.

Upon that plan he concentrated all his energies. Schleicher was completely taken up with the task of its preparation. Through a mouth to mouth campaign Seeckt's name was suddenly to be brought forward and rushed through in the last months of the race. Then suddenly the unexpected death of Ebert broke down all these hopes and plans. With his preparations incomplete, the

parties of the right unwilling to give him a blank check as their candidate, Seeckt preferred to bury his aspiration for the time rather than expose himself to possible defeat.

The election of Field Marshal Hindenburg came as a second blow. As great as Seeckt's personal veneration for the old marshal was, his accession to the post of Reichspresident in place of Ebert threatened to curtail his own freedom of action and undermine the very basis of his power. Hitherto Seeckt had been able to concentrate the entire devotion and affection of the Reichswehr on his person alone. Ebert had been the nominal commander in chief, but Seeckt had seen to it that he was afforded no opportunity to make that nominal function effective, refusing Ebert's request to attend the maneuvers and even ordering that the highest military honor, the "march past," should not be rendered to him. With the first soldier of Germany in his place, all this was changed. Seeckt could not well prevent, nor protest against the fact that Hindenburg became commander in chief in fact as well as in fiction, or that in consequence a good deal of the devotion hitherto concentrated upon him would go to the venerable figure of the marshal whose supreme, if more remote, authority began to overshadow his own.

Above all, he was no longer in the position to pursue an issue to the point of open insubordination against Hindenburg as he would not have hesitated to do with Ebert. That fact was to prove his undoing, when in the following autumn a still inadequately explained incident—in which the eldest son of the Crown Prince took part with Seeckt's knowledge in the maneuvers—precipitated a crisis in the course of which Gessler suddenly turned against him. When Seeckt realized that he would have to maintain himself by force and found Hindenburg disinclined to back him in this, he decided, against the advice of his collaborators, to give way and resign, rather than bring about a conflict which would shake the inner unity of the force which he had built up with such great effort.

III

Seeckt's reconstitution of the Reichswehr has proved, in its ultimate consequences, so disastrous not only to Germany herself but to the entire world that it may be permissible to devote a few more words to it in retrospect.

When Seeckt took over its leadership the Reichswehr was not only "shaken to its depths" by the recent conflict within its ranks,

but without any common ground of allegiance or political basis. The old bond of personal devotion to the sovereign had broken in the Revolution. The Republic, regarded at best with suspicion, at worst with fanatical hatred, had failed to replace it by any new allegiance. The very notion of unquestioning discipline had disappeared in the tumultuous period of the "Free Corps."

At that moment Seeckt appeared and insisted that discipline must be restored with absolute severity for its own sake alone, although there was nothing further to support it than the abstract recognition that only thus could a reliable military force be reestablished again. It was as if he had asked the Reichswehr to drag itself à la Münchhausen by its own bootstraps out of the political bog into which it had fallen.

That Seeckt succeeded in this despite the waves of opposition that broke down upon him from all sides was due in part to the passionate intensity with which he threw himself into his task, in part to his masterful personality, in part to his exceptional ability in almost every military sphere.

But it was also due to the singular intensity with which he concentrated in his person the very essence of the old Prussian tradition. Only a man born and reared in that tradition, starting his life in the army in the Alexander Grenadier Guards, the most distinguished regiment next to the 1st Foot Guards, only one of the outstanding representatives of the General Staff, could so effectively appeal to that tradition. In those days when all the old foundations seemed shattered and trust and faith broken even between men who had known each other intimately over many years, only such a figure could hope to overcome the blind, embittered opposition to any compromise with the existing regime that dominated the mass of the old officers and win their confidence which became the basis of his success.

Neither Groener nor Reinhardt were equal to Seeckt in personality or in intellectual stature. But even if they had been, they would have failed where he succeeded, because coming from the South, from democratic Württemberg, they would have been overwhelmed by the waves of distrust which he just survived.*

*This persistent distrust pursued Reinhardt throughout his subsequent career as commander of the division at Stuttgart and several times prevented his being recalled into the *Heeresleitung*. Years after his death (in 1935) the writer was surprised to find it surviving in all its former virulence among the officers of the Reichswehr. The same was the case with Groener, who was never forgiven his alleged share in the Kaiser's decision to flee to Holland, his support of the government in its decision to sign the Treaty of Versailles, as well as his well-known democratic leanings. The result was that as minister of war (1928 to 1932) he was never able to win the wholehearted support Seeckt had achieved and in the spring of 1932 could be ousted by Schleicher and Hammerstein with the simple statement that the Reichswehr no longer stood behind him.

But if the Prussian tradition was thus the soil out of which Seeckt drew both the strength and the inspiration for his work, on the other hand it adversely affected both his own vision (outlook) and the direction which he imparted to the new force. Not that he was an utterly implacable champion of the past. In matters of detail he could in fact be openminded and willing to learn. But in his main convictions he was inflexibly rooted in a world that had passed away. When he drew his program for the reconstruction of the Reich after his retirement, it proved an idealized past with a few slight concessions to the changed conditions.

The result was that he neither found a way to the new republic, nor wished the Reichswehr to do so. In contrast to Scharnhorst's great reform, with which his achievement has so frequently been compared, the army was reconstituted by him, not in conjunction with the general political development of the country, but apart from it and in barely concealed opposition.

Outwardly the Reichswehr's loyalty to "state" and "nation" were proclaimed on every occasion. But "state" and "nation" as the Reichswehr understood them were not the Weimar Republic but "the permanent substance of the German state and people." To it the existing regime constituted but an ephemeral form, that would ultimately give way to another and better one.

The soldier was indeed sworn in specifically on the constitution of that temporary form. But it had always been a basic tenet with Seeckt that any soldierly allegiance involving the readiness to sacrifice one's life could only be given to a person, not to the abstract paragraphs of a document. What Seeckt himself thought of that document he showed plainly by finding every year on Constitution Day absolutely urgent work in the country that prevented him from attending the official celebration at the Ministry of War.

Thus as a result of the impulse imparted to it by Seeckt, the Reichswehr never arrived at an honest relationship with its legitimate government. In the words of a well known political writer, it paid lip service to the Republic, yet rejected it in its heart; was fundamentally royalist, yet avoided any open expression; sympathized secretly with the right wing opposition, yet carefully refrained from identifying itself with it. The Reichswehr lived in the past and the future and not the present. It was rooted in the cult of the Old Army, living for the new nation which was to be.

IV

With Seeckt's resignation the first stormy period of the Reichswehr's reconstitution came to an end. The foundations had been laid, even though the hopes and aspirations based upon them had not been fulfilled. Seeckt's successor, sharing neither his unbounded ambition nor his domineering personality,³ were satisfied with maintaining and slowly developing what he had set up. However, even without any special effort of their own, they were soon beginning to reap where he had sown. As the Weimar Republic, after a brief period of consolidation from 1924-1929, was rapidly beginning to disintegrate again under the impact of the world crisis and the growth of radicalism, the influence of the only two stable elements, the Reichspresident and the Reichswehr, rose correspondingly, until in 1930 Groener, who had succeeded Gesseler in 1928, could openly proclaim at the autumn maneuvers: "In the political structure of Germany no stone may be moved without the Reichswehr casting the decisive vote." As the President became more and more the supreme source of authority, and the Reichswehr, as his main support, the openly acknowledged arbiter of the political field in which no cabinet could be formed, no major move be made without its consent, Schleicher's star rose.

Seeckt's loss had been Schleicher's gain. Old Marshal Hindenburg's only son Oscar had been his mess mate and boon companion in their early days as young lieutenants in the 3rd Foot Guards and the old General had enjoyed the lively personality of the young officer who had come to visit him in his retirement at Hanover. After Hindenburg's election to the presidency Schleicher resumed the old and pleasant connections as a daily visitor in the presidential palace and gained over the old Marshal an ascendancy which until the final denouement, nothing was able to shake or affect. With this invaluable support to back him, Schleicher was able two years after Seeckt's resignation to get rid of Gesseler and replace him by his patron Groener, who considered him almost as his adopted son and the following year to replace the stop gap, Heye in the *Heeresleitung* by his intimate friend Hammerstein.

³When Seeckt soon after his resignation heard that General Heye, the new "Chef der Heeresleitung" had been in considerable difficulties to prevent the Government from acquiring influence over the selection of officer candidates, he remarked to his former ADC "But he had only to say that he had a hundred thousand men behind him and did not want to!" When Heye heard of this he remarked. "Seeckt could say that, but not his successor." Rabenau, *Seeckt*, II, p. 487.

Schleicher's scintilating, intriguing personality is far more difficult to grasp than Seeckt's. During his lifetime he deliberately surrounded himself with an atmosphere of mystery. Since his murder (1934) his friends have not had an opportunity to present his side of the case. From the fragmentary and conflicting evidence at our disposal, however, we gain the impression of a man of great personal charm and political gifts. Considerably younger than Seeckt, he frankly accepted the new world in which he was forced to act and tried to make the best of it. Many of his actions may have been motivated by reasons of publicity; but there is no reason to believe that his appreciation of the new industrial world, of the significance of the labor movement, of the power of the press, or his readiness to seek new peaceful arrangements with France were not genuine. His weakness seems to have lain rather in a persistent levity of disposition leading him fatally to underestimate the difficulties of the problems he faced and overestimate his own cleverness. The result was that many of his schemes miscarried, not because they were intrinsically without merit, but because they were undertaken without due appreciation of their implications, misused to secure temporary advantages, or prematurely abandoned. Thus he lost the confidence of the Reichswehr, where as the "Bureau General" he had never been popular.

The increasing disintegration of the parliamentary system made the continuation of his policy of pulling the strings from the *Minister-Amt* of the Ministry of War, a post specially created for him in 1931, no longer possible and finally forced him to act in the open. As the breakdown of the old parties was followed by the failure of the new alignment of 1930 under the leadership of Brüning (which Schleicher had sponsored in the hope of finding a new basis for parliamentary maneuvering), the rising tide of radicalism, communists on one side, Nazis on the other, led him to fear that the Reichswehr might no longer be strong enough to cope with both of them, and hence would have to come to an arrangement with the Nazis.

The exact role of the Reichswehr in the rise of the Nazi party to power is still a controversial question. It is certain, however, that the rise of the young Nazi party took place under the benevolent sponsorship, if not actually at the instigation, of the local Bavarian representatives of the Reichswehr. The success of the new movement raised it above most of the other nationalist movements which the Reichswehr endeavored to keep under its control. It is highly significant that in the spring of 1923, when

Seeckt was preparing open resistance to the French occupation of the Ruhr, and to that end sought contact with all leading figures, he saw Ludendorff first and a fortnight later Adolf Hitler.

It was the first time that the two men met and the impression upon the normally so unimpressive Seeckt was remarkable indeed. He seems to have felt it one of the outstanding events of his life. We do not know whether his appreciation changed for the time being as a result of Hitler's madcap putsch and melodramatic appearance before the court that tried him and his associates. But it would not be surprising to find that the remarkable decision that permitted Hitler, after his period of confinement at Landsberg to resume his agitational activities, had received the support of the Reichswehr. After his resignation Seeckt continued to express his sympathy with the Nazi movement, and his desire to see them participate in the government. "I counsel you to vote for Hitler. Youth is right. I am too old," he wrote to his sister during violently contested presidential elections of 1932. This was highly significant, since it implied voting against Hindenburg.

But it was one thing for Seeckt out of office and out of the political running, to take so benevolent an attitude towards the new movement, and quite another for his successors in the leadership of the Reichswehr. In the first instance, none of them approached Seeckt's intensity of political fervor. The fantastic expansion of the Nazi party from 1929 onward raised quite new problems. The unique position of the Reichswehr in the political life of the Weimar Republic rested upon two, and two factors only: that it had a practical monopoly of arms, and that it formed an absolutely homogeneous force in the hands of its leaders. Beyond that it claimed control over all illegal military activities. The Reichswehr leaders were determined to maintain that absolute homogeneity and monopoly of armed forces at any cost. When the Nazi avalanche set in, their military aspirations were smiled upon in the Ministry of War, but their political attraction for the rank and file and in particular the enthusiastic younger officers caused increasing apprehension.

When three lieutenants in their indecision over what to do if they were ordered out against the Nazis went to the Brown House in Munich for advice, the Reichswehr leaders had them arraigned before the highest German court at Leipzig. The revelations of that trial, which excited Germany for weeks, were taken calmly by Groener and the other Reichswehr authorities.

But Schleicher did not concur with them. With his high opinion of modern mass movements and his conviction that the Reichswehr must never again be caught, like the old army, without a political "flanking guard," he became convinced of the necessity for coming to an arrangement with the Nazis. To that end he opened discussions with Roehm, in order to ascertain how far the Nazi stormtroopers might be utilized in his schemes for the rearmament, and began to advocate the inclusion of the Nazi leaders in the Cabinet. Whether he did that for the purpose of developing them "under a firm hand" or merely to let them "use themselves up," does not seem to have been clear or consistent in his own mind.

Brüning's flat refusal to consider that suggestion was one reason if not *the* decisive reason which in the late autumn of 1931 finally turned Schleicher to work against him. But although successful in overthrowing Brüning, Schleicher badly miscalculated his ability to control the Nazis, as well as the situation in general. Forced to emerge from his safe retreat and take over first the Ministry of War and finally the chancellorship itself, he exhausted his resources in a series of political maneuvers that ended in alienating the Reichswehr and Hindenburg. On January 30, 1933, the old Marshal installed in his place a new national government headed by Adolf Hitler.

V

Despite all that had preceded it, the new government of "national reconstruction" came to the Reichswehr leaders in the nature of a surprise. The hated "party state" of the Weimar Republic had come to an end, although its external trappings were still preserved for several months until the newly elected Reichstag had been browbeaten into granting the new government plenary powers for four years. But the new combination that had taken its place was an *ad hoc* arrangement of untried strength and anything but reassuring antecedents.

Time was short. The restoration of the military power of Germany which had been the Reichswehr's ultimate goal had reached a critical stage. Brüning and Schleicher had taken up that question in Geneva but after promising beginnings had failed to achieve any results. Now or never was the time to profit from that refusal and the favorable moral opening for a *fait accompli* which it offered. The preliminary work would be completed by the spring and summer of that year, any further hesita-

tion or delay would be fatal. The new regime assured the elimination of any effective internal opposition and its leader threw himself into the project with an enthusiasm that contrasted most favorably with the endless pleas for caution which the military leaders had up to that time encountered even with fundamentally well inclined civilian authorities.

The readiness of the Reichswehr to accept the new government's domination of the political scene was reenforced by their desire to return to Seeckt's fundamental tradition of "holding the Reichswehr out of the political arena." When, in the last stages of his career, Schleicher had finally been forced to emerge out of the mysterious semi-obscurity from which he had been manipulating the political field so long and so successfully, and to assume in person responsibility both for the Papen cabinet and his own, he had nearly destroyed the Reichswehr's vital unity. The result was that by the time of Hitler's accession to power, the Reichswehr was heartily sick of the political role which it had been forced to play under Schleicher and longed to concentrate upon its own military problems again.

Moreover, unlike Seeckt or Schleicher, none of the Reichswehr's leaders had pronounced political aspirations, not even General von Fritsch, who in February 1934 took over the *Heeresleitung* from the despondent Hammerstein.⁴ Therefore they were only too satisfied to leave the work of political reconstruction to the Nazis, assuming that they would always have the power to interfere, whenever necessary. It was a most dangerous delusion and it left them with nothing to fall back upon if the abuses of the new regime outweighed its usefulness.

These considerations help to explain the decision of the Reichswehr leaders to back the Nazi regime not only when Hindenburg imposed it upon them, but what was far more significant, when his death and the dissolution of the Weimar Republic had left their hands free. For by that time, they had had ample opportunity in eighteen months of hectic partnership with the Nazis to gain the measure of their collaborators. Barely a month before, Adolf Hitler had staged the bloodbath of June 30, 1934, which for sheer cynicism and hypocrisy still stands unrivalled even in the annals of Nazism, and then attempted to "justify" this procedure before the Reichstag. Yet little more than a fortnight later

⁴Fritsch was known in the army as a particularly close disciple of Seeckt. In 1926 Seeckt had entrusted Fritsch with one of the key positions in the General Staff, the First Section of the Truppen-Amt. During the crisis that led to Seeckt's resignation, Fritsch had been foremost in urging him to maintain his position by force of arms.

the leaders of the Reichswehr accepted him as the supreme leader of the new Germany and agreed to let the forces swear a personal oath of allegiance to him. .

The events and decisions which preceded that vital step have remained in mystery. Perhaps promises of a restoration of the monarchy "in due course" played a part. The simplest and at the same time the most cogent reason, however, for the Reichswehr's acceptance of the Hitler oath was that at this moment the rearmament preparations had been completed and were reaching the critical phase of action. Two months later, on October 1, 1934, the great expansion of the Reichswehr began. The Reichswehr leaders could not afford to "push over the applecart" at this moment.

Yet, instead of an equilibrium, in which the Reichswehr surrendered political control to the Nazis in return for autonomy in its own sphere, the arrangement of August 1934 inaugurated a latent struggle between the two parties, in which the Nazi leaders proved more adept than the Army, despite its outwardly vastly superior strength. A few months later the fundamental claim of the Reichswehr to the monopoly of armed force, which had just been solemnly reaffirmed, was challenged and broken by the dispatch of a consignment of heavy arms to the East Prussian *Schutzstaffel*. The local Reichswehr commander at first held firm, but finally had to give way upon orders from the Ministry of War itself. That incident, utilized by the Nazi leaders according to their custom to test opponents, proved a decisive step in the process that led first to the constitution of fully trained and equipped S.S. units and finally after the outbreak of the war, to the establishment of the S.S.-in-Arms as a separate *Elite Guard* side by side with the ordinary army.

At the same time the army's monopoly of armed force and military training was thus gradually being undermined, the intimate cohesion that formed the basis of its power was inevitably weakened by the process of rearmament itself as the old closely knit units were broken up and dispersed throughout the new masses. Even more significant was the fact that the leaders of the Reichswehr could not even keep their own ranks closed. In the beginning General von Blomberg, the Minister of War, was almost the sole important Nazi "soldier," and he had to go to extreme lengths in order to reinforce the small group of pronounced Nazi adherents in the officer corps. But as the Third Reich consolidated itself and the Führer proved unexpectedly successful in such matters as the remilitarization of the Rhine-

land, the officer corps began to split up. The bulk of the older generals, backed by a substantial part of the elder officers, still stood behind Fritsch's efforts to preserve the independence of the army. But many of the younger men went over wholeheartedly to the new regime, and the mass was indifferent to all political issues.

Finally, in January 1938 Fritsch decided to utilize Blomberg's objectionable second marriage in order to get rid of him and reaffirm the Army's position. The swiftness with which Hitler broke up that attack and turned the tables on the attackers revealed how little Fritsch and his backers realized the weakness of their position. Instead of reaffirming the army's independence the incident ended with the retirement of both Fritsch and Blomberg, the breaking up of the circle of elder generals in the army and air force that had been his main support, the abolition of the post of Minister of War, and the assumption of direct personal command by Adolf Hitler.

VI

The clash of February 4, 1938, was the real dividing line in the relations between the leaders of the Army and Adolf Hitler. Up to that time the relationship between the two had still been more or less that of equal partners, and the generals, despite all concessions which they had been forced to make, could believe, as Fritsch actually did, that in a final crisis they would still be capable of making their will prevail. From that moment onwards the superiority of the Nazi regime over the army was clearly established. Six months later General Beck, the Chief of the General Staff and next to Fritsch the leader of opposition, left after the Munich crisis because he had not been able to have an order enforced forbidding officers on active service to be members of the Nazi Party.

With the outbreak of the war the amalgamation of the army into the Third Reich came to its conclusion. In this situation all former dissensions were shelved. With the exception of Fritsch, who chose an honorable suicide and Beck who seems to have kept completely aloof, the ousted generals returned to their posts, as far as they had not done so already during the preceding crises. Even so inveterate an opponent of the Nazi regime as Hammerstein, whose internment was several times rumored in the press, seems, according to reliable observers to have rejoined the colors during the Polish campaign.

In the prosecution of the war collaboration between the two groups, the Nazi leaders and the generals, has functioned more effectively than most outside observers had believed possible. Some of the staunchest supporters of the army group, like von Leeb and von Rundstedt developed into outstanding commanders on the German side. But in all other respects the fundamental differences between the two camps has remained, and beneath the surface the tug-of-war between them has gone on with undiminished intensity.

It is plainly impossible to discern more than the general drift of that struggle from the flood of rumors pouring out from the clandestine radio stations operating in Germany and to a lesser extent the neutral press. We must therefore confine ourselves to the few salient points that have emerged.

In the first instance, the war greatly extended the army's prestige and importance, but not to the extent of giving the upper hand to the army again as many believed it would. Many decisive controls in the administration of the country passed into the hands of the military. Officers of the General Staff took key positions in propaganda and censorship, in the ministries of transportation and economics, and through the net of armament inspectors, controlled the industrial organization of the country.

This control, although somewhat modified in 1942, does not appear to have been conspicuously altered during the course of the war.

Nevertheless the military leaders have at decisive moments proved clearly unable to make their will prevail. There have been various reasons for this. First is the fact that Adolf Hitler's supreme command has been a reality. Obviously he could not have fulfilled even one half of the military functions attributed to him in the popular press and in serious military publications. But there can be no doubt that the supreme decisions of the war, involving simultaneously military and political issues, such as the invasion of Denmark and Norway, the decision to attack Russia, the decision to persist before Moscow in the autumn of 1941 and before Stalingrad in the following year, have been his and his alone. How far he has actually intervened in the details of the conduct of operations must remain open to doubt. But it must be remembered that in a country so onesidedly indoctrinated as Germany, even the fiction of such an intimate control would itself serve as a highly effective instrument in the hands of so astute a leader as Adolf Hitler.

In the second instance the army's complexion itself has changed. The circle of the older generals, who up to 1938 endeavored under Fritsch's leadership to maintain its independence within the Third Reich, has been dispersed. Some are dead, others have withdrawn or have been forcibly evicted. Those who continue in the service find themselves side by side with a crop of new leaders, young, ambitious, utterly unscrupulous.

Under the Nazi regime military careers have been fantastic as measured by former standards. Conspicuous examples are General Zeitzler, who after a none too distinguished career rose in 1942 from colonel to full general; Römmel who rose from Major General in 1939 to General Field Marshal in 1942.

Some of them have risen to key positions in the hierarchy, such as Alfred Jodl, the Führer's person liaison man with the Supreme Command, or Zeitzler, for a period Chief of the Army General Staff. In the lower ranks the dilution of the old officer nucleus has been incomparably greater. How far in these circumstances the old leaders of the army have been able to maintain cohesion and retain something of their former control of army machinery is a vital question which, for obvious reasons, cannot be answered.

The third important factor has been the extraordinary strengthening of the position of the S.S. and the use of the S.S.-in-Arms. With the outbreak of the war Heinrich Himmler was given a special position independent of either the military or the civilian authorities. To the extraordinary coercive powers wielded by him under the sole control of the Führer himself has since been added "civilian defense," and recently control over the entire civilian administration as Minister of the Interior. Simultaneously with this strengthening of the S.S. on the home front, those sections of the S.S. that had been equipped and trained along military lines, have been systematically built up into a separate élite force side by side with the regular army. Recognized by the Führer as the equal of the three elder services, the S.S.-in-Arms probably numbered a score of divisions in 1943 including S.S. police divisions, used both for combat purposes as well as for clearing up actions behind the front line. Completely distinct from the regular army, with which it cooperates, the S.S.-in-Arms is trained, organized, and equipped along its own special lines, with its own independent recruiting system, administration, and services. Able to offer far more advantageous conditions and peacetime promises to its members than the regular army, it has tended to drain the army of the more adventurous spirits, some-

what along the same lines as the "shock troop battalions" drained the infantry of the line. The fundamental difference is that the S.S.-in-Arms was not founded as a wartime expedient, but primarily as a pretorian guard, designed to ensure the party leader's control over the services much as the S.S. ensures their hold over the civilian masses.

Chapter Six

VERSAILLES AND REARMAMENT

I

The reconstitution of the German Army in the Reichswehr was determined in its outward forms by the Treaty of Versailles, in its inner organization and spirit, by Seeckt.

The Treaty of Versailles restricted the total military force to be allowed to Germany in future to 100,000 long-term volunteers, including 4,000 officers, organized in seven infantry and three cavalry divisions, the distribution and armament of which were prescribed down to the smallest details. The Reichswehr was to be restricted to light arms and field guns only; heavy artillery, tanks and planes were prohibited, with the exception of a score of stationary pieces in the old fortress of Königsberg. The Great General Staff and the Military Academy were to be dissolved; all military schools with the exception of one for each of the four main arms were to be abolished; all armament factories except for one for each particular piece of equipment were to be scrapped. All preparation for a secret mobilization, such as the keeping of registers of trained military personnel was strictly prohibited.

Seeckt's influence on the constitution of the Reichswehr began early in 1919, when he was first approached for his advice, and increased steadily until in July he was officially appointed head of the preparatory commission for the Peace Army. In a score of memoranda, which he addressed to Groener, Reinhardt, and the members of his commission throughout that year, the leading ideas gradually crystallized and despite much opposition were accepted almost in their entirety in the final draft completed in the autumn of 1919, but not promulgated as a law until March 31, 1921.

The main idea which Seeckt in the course of these discussions developed was the complete unification of the supreme leadership. In the beginning he had been highly doubtful on this point. In a memorandum of March 1, 1919 he despaired even of bring-

ing about external unification of the new force, believing that it would have to be reconstituted in the old separate Prussian, Saxon, Bavarian, and Württembergian armies, merely coordinated by treaty. In the end the Reichswehr was made a completely unified federal force; the individual states (except Bavaria) remained merely a sentimental attachment with their local units. The anarchy of directing agencies that had been such a bane on the development of the Old Army—the Minister of War, Chief of the Military Cabinet, Chief of the General Staff, the inspectors general of the various arms branches was abolished and supreme control over all military activities vested in the *Chef der Heeresleitung*, the Navy alone remaining out of the fold.

Simultaneously, with this concentration of the entire military control in the hands of the *Chef der Heeresleitung* Seeckt succeeded in pushing through the second point which alone could make that control effective: the centralization of all military activities in the General Staff. Camouflaged as the *Truppen-Amt*, the latter became, out of a special institution mainly concerned with strategic planning and the training of its own members, the central executive organ through which the *Chef der Heeresleitung* made his will felt throughout the entire force. In addition, the substitution of the General Staff for the Ministry of War meant an elimination of bureaucratic methods, against which Seeckt all his life waged an embittered war, in favor of the ready, self-confident methods of the General Staff. This change was to prove doubly important in a period when so much of the work of the Ministry of War was illegal and the officers forced to assume unheard of responsibility, frequently without written instructions to back them if things went wrong.

Beyond the reorganization and centralization of the supreme command, Seeckt's main aim as head of the Preparatory Commission and later of the *Heeresleitung*, was to achieve the utmost exploitation of the limited possibilities left to the Reichswehr, by the most thorough training, the adaptation of all technical improvements, finally through developing the highest possible excellence of tactical coordination and strategic leadership.

The possibility of selecting its personnel from a volunteer army more than four times their number enabled the Reichswehr authorities to start with first class human material.

Its four thousand officers were the élite of the Old Army, particular attention being devoted to combining in the right proportions the ripe experience of the best among the former General

Staff officers and commanders with the dash and practical fighting experience of the pick of the wartime subalterns. This exceedingly high level Seeckt endeavored to maintain and if possible improve still further both by extremely stiff conditions for the new entries as well as by the extraordinary demands made upon all ranks. Failure to live up to these demands resulted in ruthless dismissal. Instead of the very lenient conditions imposed before 1914, completion of a high school course became the prerequisite for acceptance as an officer candidate. The future officer had to pass a strenuous four-and-a-half year course, including a full two year's course at the military school, before he gained his commission. No effort was spared to spread intellectual activity beyond the General Staff to the officers corps as a whole. The preparation for the Military Academy (*Wehrkreisprufung*), formerly voluntary, was made compulsory, although only a fraction of the best candidates could actually be called to the course. Every officer who failed to qualify for the grade higher than his own was promptly and summarily dismissed.

In the same manner the physical and intellectual standards of the rank and file were raised to levels hitherto unknown and unachievable in any force based upon conscription. The transition from a conscript army to a long-service volunteer force brought many new problems. If the service was to be made tolerable and attractive during twelve long years, its inner and outer conditions had to be changed. Despite the lack of means, everything possible was done to make the barracks more cheerful than they had been. More space was allotted to the individual; food was improved; the whole administration at Seeckt's inspiration was conducted on the "gentleman principle" of neatness and order for its own sake alone. The nominal pay of the conscript was increased to a tolerable standard, and a gradual increase was made possible by the introduction of three new grades between the private and the noncommissioned officer. Church, parade and (for the older soldier) curfew were abolished; disciplinary regulations were greatly improved, punishment being left to the discretion of the individual officer and the emphasis laid upon appeal to the culprit's sense of honor.

All this was but the reflection of a fundamental change in the social outlook of the Reichswehr. Its leaders had brought back from the trenches an understanding of the necessity of placing the discipline of the army and the general relationship between the leader and his men upon an entirely new footing. The break-

down of the contact between officers and men in the autumn of 1918 had been a warning not to let a similar gulf develop again. Thus, without relaxing the outer forms of discipline, they were at pains to forge the new relations between the officer and his men based not on mere external authority but on a real inner bond. From the beginning the young officer was impressed with the necessity of gaining the confidence and comradeship of his men without forfeiting his authority.

This profound change in the relationship between the officers and the rank and file forms perhaps the most significant aspect of the reconstruction of the German Army after the World War. From the Reichswehr it passed on to the new army of 1935, in which, under the influence of the general ideology of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, it led to an almost complete breaking down of the social barriers that had so long separated the two groups. In the Reichswehr not more than a token advance was made in that direction by permitting privates of exceptional promise to present themselves, after a certain period in the ranks, for a series of three examinations which, when passed, placed them upon an equal footing with the normal officer candidates and enabled them to enter the officer ranks through the usual channels.

With human material of such high quality the Reichswehr was able to attain a state of efficiency previously unknown. The very length of the service made it necessary to devise new and more highly graded methods, in order to maintain the spirit of the men. Toward the end of Seeckt's tenure a new system was developed for breaking up the training units into six classes (young recruits, older men of limited capability, noncom candidates, group leaders, company leaders). This device enabled the commanders to distribute their men into homogeneous groups according to their previous training and natural ability, and consequently to develop each soldier to the highest efficiency within his individual reach. The aim was, as with the officers, to enable him to fulfill at least the functions of the next higher grade. In addition, the entire training program of the Reichswehr was organized from 1927 onwards upon a three-year rotation scheme, the work each year being concentrated upon the detailed study of a different branch or weapon (rifle training, machine gun training, technical training). At the same time, the attention of the authorities, which in the first years had been primarily directed upon welding the major units together for possible immediate service, was later concentrated upon the elaborate in-

struction of the smallest units, companies, squadrons, and batteries. Drill, at first very strongly emphasized to restore the shaken discipline, gave way to field exercises and sports.

Perhaps this intensity of training developed in the long-term Reichswehr contributed toward the peculiar bias of the new German Army for complicated weapons and instruments which demand a high degree of skill in their operation. In any case, it was largely through it that the Reichswehr was able to offset deficiencies in technical equipment. For despite Seeckt's efforts to maintain contact with technical development at large and with industry, this part of the Versailles Treaty proved singularly difficult to circumvent. Forbidden institutions or preparations could be camouflaged, forbidden guns, tanks or planes could not. Theoretical study and exercises with dummy weapons were but poor substitutes, while the few experimental laboratories and training fields had for the most part to be established outside of the confines of the Reich. Thus in the main the Reichswehr was confined to learning to handle its own weapons with the highest precision and improve its general efficiency to the utmost.

This was particularly the case in respect to the coordination between the various arms, which prior to 1914 had not received the full attention due it in the Old Army. In 1914 the Germans had found their French opponents markedly superior in this respect, notably in the effective coordination of infantry and artillery. Now the utmost attention was devoted to this point. Although for reasons of economy the location of both arms in the same garrison was seldom possible, everything was done in order to encourage the closest cooperation. Methods of cooperation developed under the stable conditions of trench warfare were adapted to mobile warfare. New forms and technical means of liaison were introduced. A spirit of teamwork was engendered which made each branch automatically seek the speediest contact with the other before going into action. This emphasis upon close collaboration was developed into a general principle, becoming another characteristic feature of the new German Army of 1935.

Another point in which the Reichswehr strove to make good a deficiency revealed by the First World War was the development of an effective system of communications. Schlieffen had failed to coordinate them with the work of the General Staff, and Ludendorff's efforts in that direction had come too late. As a result the Battle of the Marne was lost at least partly because of the inadequate communications between Imperial Headquar-

ters and the commanders of the armies of the right wing. Since then communications had made enormous progress, effectively coordinating in the latter part of the World War an area reaching from Northern France to South Russia and Mesopotamia. These experiences were utilized by Seeckt and his collaborators to develop a system of close integration between the hierarchy of command and its technical services. Upon the advice of Wetzell, his inspector of communication services, Seeckt adopted the highly successful expedient of skeleton exercises, restricted to the command and communication apparatus on both sides, and only token forces, or even no forces at all, as in the extensive exercise of 1926, comprising the entire military hierarchy and communication forces of the Reichswehr.

Yet the fundamental fact remains that in its basic intentions and main features, Seeckt's constitution of the Reichswehr was *militarily* no less than *politically*, a reaffirmation of the *old* order, and not an attempt to replace it by a *new* one. What he had set himself to achieve was to crystallize and preserve in a new form the essence of the Old Imperial Army; its spirit, traditions, institutions and methods. These, he claimed, had been more than vindicated in the four years of war. Nowhere is this essentially restorative character of Seeckt's outlook and work more plainly evident than in his return, after the First World War, to the tradition of mobile warfare as the basic strategic idea of the Reichswehr. On this all-important issue opinions were widely and sharply divided in Germany. Recalling four years of trench warfare, many officers were inclined to consider mobile warfare as a thing of the past and looked on the semi-mobile conditions in which the war had ended as the basis of all future developments. At their head was Reinhardt, who in his writings sought a thorough revision of German tactical and strategical traditions in the light of the experiences of the war in the West interpreted by him along lines strikingly similar to those predominant on the other side of the Rhine. If he had remained in the *Heeresleitung*, it is difficult to conceive how the radical difference of outlook between him and Seeckt on this fundamental issue could have been resolved. Seeckt might have won in the end, but hardly without serious confusion and dissension in the ranks of the Reichswehr.

Thus by removing Reinhardt and setting Seeckt in his place, the Kapp Putsch decided the strategic no less than the political outlook of the Reichswehr. From his first regulations onward

Seeckt based the training of the Reichswehr unequivocally upon the assumption that strategic mobility could be recovered, giving attack precedence over defense and imposing his opinion with so much determination, that he not only carried his point completely, but spared the Reichswehr practically all discussion of it. Only in 1922 he seems to have felt the opposition of the trench warfare adherents emerging again, for he expressed himself most sharply on this point during various maneuvers, reiterating the vital necessity of making oneself free from its fetters.

This curiously contradictory nature of Seeckt's outlook, remarkably open-minded in all matters of detail and ready to accept and utilize the methods and instruments of the new age, yet fundamentally rooted in the old and disinclined to accept any radical alteration or even criticism of its foundations, is shown very clearly in his attitude towards the new psychological approach to warfare. Seeckt, who had always been interested in and supported the early efforts to adapt psychological tests to military purposes, was violently annoyed when Captain Hesse, one of the most lively intellectual leaders of the younger generation, accused the Old Imperial Army in his *Feldherr Psychologos* of having neglected psychological factors and pleaded for its more favorable consideration in the future. A rare thing for him, Seeckt came back to the matter in his *Thoughts of a Soldier* and emphatically claimed that the proper appreciation of the psychological elements had always been one of the characteristic traits of the old tradition and that there was no need for the establishment of a special service.

II

Yet the preservation of the tradition, spirit, tactical and strategic heritages of the Old Imperial Army in the new force was but one aspect of Seeckt's endeavors. The other, pursued by him with relentless tenacity in the face of seemingly insuperable difficulties was the preparation for its eventual expansion into a full scale force as soon as politically feasible or as a sudden emergency might demand it.

The organization of the Reichswehr into a dual purpose force capable of serving alternately as a high class professional army or *Elitetheer*, or as the framework for an expanded force of many times its original size (a *Führerheer*)—in which the officers would take charge of all higher command duties from the captain upwards, the best of the noncommissioned officers become

lieutenants, and the entire rank and file serve as noncommissioned officers—was relatively an easy task. Incomparably more difficult was the gradual reorganization of the forces that were to fill up this framework. In the days of Scharnhorst and the Reformers this had been a relatively simple (if by no means easy) matter: the surreptitious training of a very limited number of reserves, the preparation of the necessary cadres and equipment (mainly guns and rifles), together with the working out of the plans for the improvisation of a Landwehr. But the Industrial Revolution had increased the complexity of the military machinery to an incomparable degree.

Warfare in the twentieth century had developed into the vastest enterprise ever conceived of or undertaken by man: a huge machinery comprising, beyond the actual organization and direction of the fighting forces themselves, the mobilization and coordination of the entire life and resources of the nation in all its innumerable ramifications and details. Once broken up it would be almost impossible to reconstitute that immense machinery again. Thus Seeckt's struggles and those of his successors to preserve the foundations for the full scale reconstitution of the German Army, involved not merely the concealment of weapons and equipment, the training of illegal levees or the surreptitious maintenance of forbidden institutions like the General Staff, or branches, like tanks and aviation. It was an almost fantastic effort to preserve, at least in its basic foundations, the entire huge organizational and institutional machinery indispensable for the effective establishment and functioning of a modern mass army. It involved the establishment of a complete network of administrative officers for the carrying through of military measures "outside of the Reichswehr," the reconstitution of an entire mobilization system including the preservation and maintenance of the lists, the collecting and retraining of an officer reserve and the establishment of organizations for reserve personnel and specialists. It involved the reconstitution of the industrial potential, beginning with its reassessment by a special net of investigators; the enlistment of the collaboration of industry and its organization under military leadership; the detailed preparation of the blueprints for a simultaneous setting up of an efficient armaments industry side by side with the rearmament itself; finally, the vast apparatus of research and experimental facilities, laboratories, firing ranges, and flying fields needed for the preservation of the accumulated experience, the digest of the lessons of

the First World War, and the continuous observation of current developments.¹

Of all this vast network of surreptitious organization and activity we get here and there a glimpse in the German military publications sufficient to impress us with its immense complexity, but quite inadequate to convey more than a bare outline. One aspect of it, however, the development of military aviation through fifteen years of concealment, until it finally emerged on March 1, 1935, as Goering's Luftwaffe, has been revealed in comparative detail and continuity and may, therefore, well serve as an illustration of the whole.

The maintenance of military aviation was apparently a particularly difficult task—far more difficult than that of tanks and antiaircraft artillery, which, so it seems, was taken over by the supply units (*Fahrtruppe*). Owing to Seeckt's energetic support (he took a particular interest in aviation), a "brain cell" of three specialists, later expanded to fifteen, was established in the *Truppen-Amt* directly under Seeckt. In addition, 180 carefully-selected flying officers were, on the official dissolution of the old air force, transferred into the new Reichswehr and so distributed as to form a nucleus of air specialists throughout the force. These specialists were entrusted with the task of maintaining and improving the air-mindedness throughout the forces under their care; the direction of ARP measures, and liaison with related civilian organizations as far as these existed. Officer candidates were given special courses in aviation during their years in the military schools. At all exercises and maneuvers special care was taken to remind the forces continuously of the influence of aviation upon the action of the ground forces, the aim being to adapt marching formations and actual tactics to probable interference from the air.

Yet the difficulties of maintaining even a skeleton force turned out to be almost insuperable. In such a limited officers' corps the air members had to be assigned other duties for which they were frequently ill-fitted. Their integration into the general system of promotion and assignment proved exceedingly difficult. Eventually a number of them left the Reichswehr in order to continue their training abroad, returning when the further expansion of flying organizations provided better openings for their employment.

¹Dr. Carl Waninger, one of the directors of Rheinmetall-Borsig concerned with the design and production of antiaircraft guns has revealed that a meeting of antiaircraft gun designers actually took place in the Dusseldorf prison under the noses of the French military authorities in 1923. *Aeroplane*, May 7, 1943, p. 531.

In 1923 the French occupation of the Ruhr convinced Seeckt that the system of merely theoretical maintenance and preparation was not enough. The establishment of an air section in the ministry of communications under a well known flier, Captain Brandenburg, assured the support of the interests of the army in civil aviation, air industry, and aeronautical research. Progress that had been made under the energetic leadership of Captain Student, technical head of the rump air force, was consolidated. Former flying pilots were organized in the Aero Club, and other air personnel in the *Ring der Flieger*.

The most important measure of this period, however, was the foundation of a special military flying school in Russia, where former flyers could be given refresher courses, new recruits trained as pilots and observers. This flying school, which formed the center of all subsequent efforts for the reconstruction of the air force, was one of the chief results of Seeckt's negotiations conducted intermittently from 1921 on with the Russian leaders for the general military cooperation between the two countries and the development of Russian armament industries with the co-operation of firms like Krupp and Junkers under the sponsorship of the Reichswehr. The revelations made by Scheidemann in the Reichstag shortly after Seeckt's resignation forced the Reichswehr temporarily to camouflage and reduce these Russian activities—which included in addition to the flying schools, training units for tanks and heavy artillery as well as manifold personal contacts between the leadership of the two forces. But the collaboration never entirely broke off. It continued even after Hitler's accession to power had radically changed the political relations between the two powers, until the proclamation of the rearmament in the spring of 1935 made any further concealment unnecessary.

Meanwhile the Reichswehr acquired an experimental field of its own near Rechlin and established military branches in aeronautical research institutes; private firms established laboratories of their own as well as experimental stations abroad. Foreign equipment and motors were purchased and new German models developed from them. In order to give practical flying experience to as many officers as possible, officer candidates were sent to civilian flying schools before entering the Reichswehr. From 1926 onward fighter-reconnaissance and bomber squadrons were established and special artillery-spotting courses instituted.

In October 1929 a special inspectorship of air forces, even the

organization of an independent air force was vehemently urged by some officers. Three special demonstration squadrons were used to determine the basis for the use of air and antiaircraft forces in the 1930 and 1931 maneuvers. The main emphasis, however, was laid upon the development of material in order to have suitable models ready when the final rearmament should start in the spring of 1933.

III

As that date drew near and discussion of the forms which such a rearmament might take became more and more open, it soon became apparent that opinions on that vital point were anything but uniform. A minority wished to retain the Reichswehr as it stood and merely expand it. The majority inclined towards Seeckt's idea expressed in his memoranda of 1919 and formulated after his retirement in various publications, of combining a small, highly-trained mobile striking force with a large-scale militia of little offensive, but considerable defensive value. In an address given in September 1931 at Magdeburg, Seeckt elaborated this idea into a concrete plan for an extension of the Reichswehr to 200,000 effectives, a reduction of its term of service from twelve to six years, and an additional force of 20,000 officers and non-commissioned officers to train and command the militia. Groener, supported by Schleicher, favored the abolishment of the Reichswehr in favor of a militia on the Swiss model, with long service volunteers for the technical troops and tank forces. This plan, under Schleicher's energetic advocacy, came very near adoption in the summer of 1932 but was wrecked by the opposition it encountered in the Disarmament Conference in Geneva.

The final plans, as they eventually were fixed some time after Hitler's accession to power, rejected all these three versions and reestablished a mass army along the lines of the Old Imperial Army on the basis of universal conscription. The reasons for this remarkable departure from the ideas that had dominated the Reichswehr outlook for the past fourteen years have, for understandable reasons, never openly been discussed. One plausible suggestion is that besides reestablishing Germany's military might, the rearmament was designed to bring about a revision of the Peace Treaty by its psychological effect. For that purpose the bigger and the more impressive its size, the better. The fact that there were millions of untrained German men in August 1914 is also said to have convinced Adolf Hitler that the maxi-

mum training and mobilization of German manpower was essential.

Two other reasons seem to suggest themselves in the light of subsequent events. It is possible that plans for an attack on Russia may have influenced Hitler's program even at this time. An attempt of that kind could only be undertaken with a mass army and by mobilizing German manpower to the utmost. Furthermore the influence of Blomberg, the new Minister of War and Hitler's chief and almost sole henchman among the generals at that time, must have been considerable. Blomberg was a great admirer of Ludendorff, whom he tried in vain to offer a field marshal's baton on Ludendorff's seventieth birthday. Ludendorff among all the leading authorities in the German military world was the outstanding exponent of mass armies and total warfare—this in radical contrast to Seeckt's ideas on both these points. On the other hand, Seeckt's influence over the ideas of the Reichswehr had been far too strong to be swept aside. As a result the closer we analyze the reconstitution of the new German Army, the more it appears not to have been the result of any clear cut plan, but a composite picture combining two widely different and fundamentally unreconciled tendencies, the one coming from Seeckt and through him from Moltke and Schlieffen, the other from Ludendorff and the First World War.

The principle of the reestablishment of a mass army based upon universal conscription once adopted, its execution raised a host of new problems and difficulties. The uncertainty as to the world's reaction to his desperate gamble demanded that the period of actual transition, and hence of maximum danger of intervention, should be reduced to a minimum, while developing a maximum of force to meet intervention, if it should come. Thus the leaders of the Reichswehr were forced in the initial stages to many measures that had to be scrapped in the later stages. These included the establishment of a powerful cavalry corps of two divisions in 1934, dissolved again two years later, and the temporary diversion of the entire supply services to the establishment of the new tank arm, artillery liaison, smoke screen, and AA units. This necessitated the temporary basing of the entire supply on an emergency organization and the reconstitution of a new supply corps from 1935 onwards. In general, the first eighteen months after Hitler's accession to power were devoted to the remodeling of the plans and to preparatory measures.

Then on October 1, 1934, the decisive step was finally taken

and the Reichswehr increased to nearly three times its numbers, more than 300,000 effectives. Rearmament had reached its critical phase. Foreign statesmen were at last beginning to press their inquiries. As soon as the new units had shaken down, the reestablishment of the Luftwaffe was proclaimed by Goering on March 1, 1935, and fifteen days later came the reintroduction of conscription. This set the goal for the German Army at a proposed strength of thirty-eight divisions with approximately 600,000 men and presented this to the world as a *fait accompli*.

When that critical move was accepted with nothing more than protests, the external campaign for rearmament had been won. The internal planning and reorganization, on the other hand, had only begun. To the degree that one success after the other crowned the Führer's reckless moves, the original project was speeded up, expanded, and revised to include the military forces of the newly incorporated Austrian and Sudeten areas. The results of experiments conducted both at home and in the laboratory of the Spanish Civil War were embodied in the changes. By the end of 1938 the total land force had risen to fifty-one divisions, including five tank divisions, four motorized and three Alpine divisions, with a yearly class of recruits of well over 500,000. The overall total of the armed forces, including navy and Luftwaffe, went far beyond a million.

Parallel with the expansion of the three services themselves, in fact preceding it, went the development of the vast administrative and research machinery necessary to prepare and supplement it in the economic, technical and intellectual spheres. On the basis of the preparatory work done in the economic section of the Ordnance Department of the Reichswehr, a special *Wehrwirtschaftsstab* was set up under Colonel, later General Thomas. It served as an economic general staff and as the central coordinating agency for economic requirements of all three services, for the establishment of an efficient armaments industry, and for the organization of the entire resources of the country for wartime mobilization. Organized into four main sections, for armament industries proper (*Rüstungs-Amt*), for the general military direction of the country's economic resources (*Wehrwirtschafts-Amt*), for the control of raw materials as well as for the supervision of agreements and prices, the *Wehrwirtschaftsstab* covered the entire country with its network of regional departments set up in every corps area under the control of the commanding generals themselves. These regional departments comprising inspectors

from all three services, became the responsible organs for all aspects of war production in their respective areas—the maximum exploitation of the capacity for armament production, the assurance of the necessary labor supply with special *Wehrwirtschaftsstellen* for the executive work in industrial centers. When the work of the economic rearmament became too large for the *Wehrwirtschaftsstab* alone and had to be expanded into the Four Years' Plan under Goering's supreme control, Thomas's closest collaborators passed on into the new organization. Other of its officers assumed direction of key controls in the Ministry of Economics and the Ministry of Transport. The *Wehrwirtschaftsstab* itself was fused in 1938 into the new central directory organ, the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, set up under the direction of Keitel when Hitler personally assumed command of the Wehrmacht as a result of the *coup d'état* of the fourth of February that year. Here it formed a twin department, the *Rüstungs- und Wehrwirtschafts-Amt*. In the spring of 1942 this was split up, the *Wehrwirtschafts-Amt* remaining in the OKW, while the *Rüstungs-Amt* was transferred to the new ministry of armaments and munitions, created under Speer.

The *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* is perhaps the most interesting, and certainly the most important institution of the new German military machine. In it Seeckt's centralization of the supreme direction of the Reichswehr in the *Heeresleitung* has been repeated on a higher plane. After the unification of all military and naval affairs respectively in the hands of the Chiefs of the *Heeres-* and the *Marineleitung*, these two services still continued to coexist side by side without any effective coordination, a state of affairs particularly noticeable in their widely divergent ideas with respect to their air sections. The setting up in 1933 of a third service with a different and pronouncedly Party outlook of its own still further increased friction, although the army, as the senior and by far the largest service, continued to maintain a certain general ascendancy over the two others. On February 4, 1938, the loose organization of the three services under Blomberg as Minister of War, was replaced by their strict coordination under the personal command of Adolf Hitler, exercised through the newly created *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* under Keitel, who in various functions since 1925 had been chiefly responsible for the organization of the rearmament. Under this supreme coordinating staff the General Staffs of the three services and their respective chiefs continue to function for the planning and

direction of their particular branches.

The greatest problem in the reconstitution of the new German Army, however, was neither its planning nor its organization, but where to find the masses of commissioned and noncommissioned personnel to provide the cadres for its constantly expanding formations. The Reichswehr, despite its organization as a *Führerheer*, proved unable to furnish even the major part of the requirements, having in addition to its own expansion to hand over an appreciable part of its personnel to the Luftwaffe.

The situation was particularly difficult with respect to the officers. The commissioning of suitable noncoms was at first restricted to only a few hundred. Reserves of officers who had recently retired from the Reichswehr were exceedingly small. The facilities for the training of young officers were rapidly expanded and the duration of the course restricted to the absolutely indispensable minimum; but until this course of supply could become really effective, years would pass. Meanwhile the bulk of the new officers had to be found elsewhere.

One important source was the officers of the militarized police units taken over *en bloc* into the new army in 1935. Many of them were ex-officers who had not been taken into the Reichswehr at the time of its original constitution, and found a refuge in the police. Many of the younger, however, were of doubtful quality. The bulk of the new officers, however, had to be taken from those former officers of the Old Imperial Army, who in 1920 passed into some civilian occupation and were ready to join up again, either as regular officers or, if their physical condition made them no longer available for field service, as E-officers for duties of an administrative character.

The result was that, apart from the question of numbers, which did not reach anything like a normal standard until shortly before the outbreak of the war, the organic unity of the officer corps, which from the day of Frederick the Great to those of the Reichswehr had formed the cornerstone of the German military system, was hopelessly broken up. In the new units officers of the Reichswehr, ex-police officers, former officers of the Old Imperial Army, absolvants of a hastily rushed through minimum course and to an ever-rising degree, former noncoms promoted directly from the ranks, rubbed shoulder to shoulder. Strive as they might, commanders complained bitterly of their inability to weld these heterogeneous elements together, scarcely finding in the perpetual coming and going caused by the constant expan-

sion and reconstruction of units the time to know their officers properly.

The difficulties in finding the necessary noncoms proved equally serious for a time. In the beginning the personnel of the Reichswehr provided an excellent groundstock, but as this began to be spread very thin, the replenishment proved difficult. Unlike the officers' career, attracting with its glamour many times the number of candidates which the military schools could deal with, the career of the noncom failed to attract either the numbers or the quality desired.

This situation became so alarming that from 1938 onwards the German military authorities saw themselves forced to revise their entire former policy. They had to grant more attractive conditions and make the commissioning of suitable NCOs an increasingly routine measure.

With the outbreak of the present conflict these problems passed into the background—outwardly at least. We have no way of ascertaining how far they may have affected the efficiency of the German Army, particularly under the severe conditions in Russia. But in any case, the expansion of the army from its fifty odd regular divisions to approximately six times that number, officered by a reserve personnel even more heterogeneous in social and professional background than that of the regular forces, has been a remarkable military achievement, even under the pressure of wartime necessity. Its success must be attributed to a large extent to the energy with which the new army carried on the new spirit of close comradeship between officers and men as well as the excellence of the training methods developed by the Reichswehr.

In no other respect have the leaders of the German Army taken the lessons of their defeat in the World War so much to their heart as in the attention devoted to the social outlook of the new army. Under the impact of the new ideology of the *Volksgemeinschaft* even those remnants of the former strict separation between the officers and their men, which still marked the Reichswehr outlook, have disappeared. The admission of "rankers" into the officers corps developed into a steady flow tending to break down all social distinctions and to make a man's career in the army depend exclusively upon his capacity for leadership. Even more striking to the foreign observer has been the lowering of the barriers formerly maintained between the various ranks in off-duty relationships; the manner in which officers and their

men will meet on equal terms, frequent the same eating places, take place at the same table, and exchange views.

Combined with the extraordinary attention devoted to the physical and even more the psychological needs of the men, this carefully nourished and strongly emphasized insistence upon the general comradeship of all those serving under arms was, in the opinion of competent observers, one of the most powerful factors in maintaining the level of the army's morale, despite its grueling experiences of the Russian front.

The second vital factor in forging the new German Army was the intensity and excellence of its training. Under the wholly different conditions of a mass army, the elaborate methods of individual training gradually developed by the Reichswehr could not be taken over unchanged. But their essence was condensed into a series of standard procedures designed to assure a thorough training of the regular classes as well as impart an indispensable minimum to the older non-trained classes, rushed through in eight-week courses. Even under these new conditions a tendency towards minute attention to detail, towards individualization and an intelligent appreciation, not a mechanically perfect execution, persisted. Characteristic of the attention devoted to the smallest details, is the story reported by Spanish visitors of the officers' school in Potsdam, how in their presence, the director, a major, a captain, and two lieutenants made a detailed examination to determine whether or not the position of one of the men lying down in the mortar pit was correct or could be seen from the position the enemy was presumed to occupy.

No less characteristic is the extreme toughness of the training, going to such lengths in the endeavor to toughen men and prepare them for the realities of combat that, according to a Swiss observer, Däniker, the men greeted the beginning of the campaign in the West in May 1940 as a relief after the strenuous practice they had been subjected to all through the winter and spring. One particularly noticeable feature of German training has been the marching performances demanded and achieved, reaching as much as fifty miles in twenty-four hours, exceeding even the best records of the Old Imperial Army during the First World War.

In this curious mixture of extreme standardization on the one hand and the striving for the maintenance of the highest individualism and flexibility possible on the other, German training methods faithfully reflect the general outlook of the new German

Army. In the eyes of its leaders the rigid standardization of everything that can be standardized, not only equipment, spare parts, motor cars, but supply columns, military units, administrative and tactical procedures—is to serve simultaneously two purposes: the utmost exploitation of the new technical possibilities and second, the preservation or reacquisition (even under the enormously complicated conditions of the new industrial warfare) of freedom of action and flexibility in organization, equipment, supply, and tactical employment. This readiness to recognize and accept the implications of the Industrial Revolution for warfare, this eagerness to secure superiority by the fullest exploitation of its possibilities as well as by the application of technical methods and ways of thinking to military procedures, this general openness of mind and experimental spirit are characteristic of the modern outlook of the new army, standing in striking contrast to the pronounced conservatism of the Old Army and even to the more traditional and less technicized nature of the Reichswehr.

The result can be seen in the development of all technical branches. At their head the engineers, with the increasing importance of special technical equipment and training for the attack of fortified points and lines as well as in crossing of rivers in the face of modern weapons, have tended to develop primarily into a technical combat force acting either independently or in combination with other forces. Correspondingly, their former technical functions: the construction of fortified positions, the removal of mines and wire obstacles, the reconstruction of bridges and the repair of roads has fallen to a whole group of new forces: the Construction Troops (*Bautruppen*), first provisionally set up for the Polish Campaign and later permanently established, the Organization Todt, The National Socialist Transport Corps, and the Reich Labor Service.

No less vast, and perhaps even more significant has been the simultaneous development of the communications and signal forces, whose training school near Halle for the army and Luftwaffe was, before the war, the greatest military college in the German Army.

Hardly any other part of the Reichswehr heritage has been so consistently and successfully developed by the new army as the system of tactical and technical coordination. The most intricate coordination between the various types of ground forces, infantry, artillery, combat engineers, tanks, as well as between

ground forces and planes, has been made the foundation of all its activities. The tendency to make all units as far as possible tactically self-contained, leading to the establishment of self-contained panzer armies, with their own complete services, planes, and motorized infantry divisions, contributed to make co-operation and coordination increasingly necessary and intricate.

As the results of such close integration of the technical forces, including the artillery, and of the disappearance of cavalry, except for small reconnaissance units, the new German army has been largely reduced to the two main arms, the infantry and the panzer forces. Originally the new German army was planned essentially as an infantry force, partly from the traditional pre-dilection of the German army for that arm, partly because the planning of the rearmament coincided with a reaction abroad in its favor. Not until the spring of 1937 was the first panzer division fully established and the early experiences with the new forces were anything but encouraging. A little later the Spanish Civil War forced a complete revision of the basic policy from reliance on a lightly armed, lightly armored, highly mobile type, to more heavily protected and less mobile models, a trend that has been continuously going on through the whole of the present war. It was not until the spring of 1939 that the occupation of Czechoslovakia enabled the German army to re-equip four light armored divisions with excellent Czech matériel, raising the total of armored divisions at one stroke from five to nine. In the Polish campaign the panzer divisions, which were still being used within the general framework of the infantry armies, proved so unexpectedly successful that during the winter they were (for the first time) combined into independent, self-contained panzer armies. Their success in carrying through the decisive strategic mission, the central breakthrough on the Meuse, and later on the break-up of the new French front behind the Somme, was such that public attention all over the world became one-sidedly focused upon them, and the very important role played by the infantry masses tended to be completely overlooked. Not until the breakdown of the great blitzkrieg in Russia, in which five panzer armies, each of four panzer and four motorized divisions, cooperated with eight infantry armies of fifteen divisions each, did the basic role of the infantry masses in the German army's system begin to receive adequate attention again. In the course of the more than two years of bitter struggle on the Russian front the infantry has regained a good deal of the ground lost, or pre-

sumed lost, during the campaigns in the West, in the Balkans and the early stages of the Russian campaign. Today, it stands again as an equal partner, not as a subordinate mass, side by side with the panzer forces.

Any attempt to achieve a general appraisal of the new German Army must necessarily start with that modern and mobile outlook touched upon above. For it is in this—in its openness of mind for the new emergencies of industrial mass warfare, its versatility, its readiness to try out any promising line, as well as to scrap unsuccessful experiments promptly (to take only a few instances from the material sphere: the withdrawal of the new field gun, introduced just before the rearmament in favor of a light howitzer as the main field weapon, the scrapping of the early plane and tank models as a result of the experiences in Spain), and its freedom from all prejudices, whether in adopting the ideas or in making compromises, its readiness to cast overboard hampering traditions—it is in these things that it differs most markedly not only from the Old Imperial Army but, to a somewhat less degree, from the Reichswehr as well. In all this it owed a great deal to the long, intimate contact with the Red Army. But with this difference, that the Red Army, finding a *tabula rasa* and starting from scratch, went all the way and based itself squarely and exclusively upon the new concept of industrial mass warfare. Whereas the new German Army, starting from a most vigorous pre-industrial tradition, just reaffirmed and immensely consolidated by Seeckt, succeeded neither in achieving a real synthesis between that tradition and its new technical spirit, nor in casting it aside altogether. The result has been that in every sphere: in its ideology, its social structure, its strategic ideas, its attitude towards its theoretical heritage, we find these two widely divergent elements of its makeup reconciled in a superficial and uneasy synthesis. Under the actual stress of war these inner strains and contradictions did not show up, particularly as long as the going was good. But there can be no doubt as to their existence or of the role which they must have played in the course of the prolonged and desperate struggle in Russia where the German Army came up against an opponent who had exploited the new developments with absolute unity of outlook and purpose.

PART TWO

Chapter Seven

COORDINATION AND COMMAND

I

For nearly two centuries the supreme command of the Prusso-German Army lay directly in the hands of the monarch himself. Frederick William I had founded the tradition; Frederick the Great consolidated it. In his life and death struggle during the Seven Years' War he was able to maintain himself against a vastly superior coalition largely because he could oppose absolute concentration of all military and political decisions to the divided counsels of his enemies. Like Charles XII of Sweden in a similar struggle fifty years earlier, Frederick was at the same time his own minister of war, military theorist, commander in chief, and chief of staff. Few of his generals showed themselves capable of independent command; none could have replaced, or even supplemented him in the organization and supreme direction of his forces. Even Winterfeldt who, until his early death in 1757 was probably closest to him, was never more than an exceptionally trusted adviser; not the chief of staff some have seen in him.

Frederick's weaker successors inherited from him this tradition of the direct royal command but not the exceptional genius needed to exercise it without assistance. The result was that beneath the cloak of their royal omnipotence, they fell in practice under the influence of a clique of irresponsible advisers, adjutants general and civilian secretaries, whose vacillating and contradictory counsels led the Prussian state and army to Jena and Auerstadt. To Stein and his collaborators this system of royal autocracy tempered by unpredictable influences was the ultimate source of the catastrophe. Its replacement by a ministry of experts, each responsible for affairs in his own particular sphere, was the cornerstone of their reforms.

The monarchy of the Hohenzollerns rested, however, far too much upon the absolute royal control over the army for them ever to have agreed to delegate it as they did their other functions. Thus the King continued to retain command in his own hands,

delegating to the Minister of War merely the routine administration together with a limited authority to issue administrative orders and regulations. In order, moreover, to prevent the minister from interposing himself between the King and the heads of the military hierarchy, the generals in command of army corps were given extraordinary independence, being placed in matters of command and training directly under the monarch. The same prerogative of immediate access to the King was granted to the heads of the arms branches such as the inspectors general of infantry, cavalry, and artillery.

In the last resort, however, the hold of the House of Hohenzollern upon the army rested upon its unique relationship to its officer corps. To the officer the King was the sole object of devotion and source of authority, the fount of any favor and advancement he could hope for. "Every officer," Frederick William II reminded his ministers on July 1, 1849, "sees in the King his personal overlord, who promotes him, cares for him, protects him. To this intimate connection between the army and its commander in chief the country owes the reliability and devotion of the army . . . Only if this traditional bond between the King and his army is left untouched, only if the unparalleled mutual devotion between the two remains unshaken, can the army remain what it was, the firm pillar upon which the monarchy relies . . ."

This intimate relationship between the supreme commander and his "comrades in arms," it was felt, did not permit the interposition of any third person. To the King's personal and exclusive decision all matters affecting his officers individually or collectively had to be reserved. Entries, appointments, promotions, pensions, favors, everything had to come from his hand. For the discharge of this voluminous administrative work the former "Adjutant Generals Office" was therefore transformed in 1812 into the King's personal cabinet for military affairs (*Militär Kabinett*), the head of which was concurrently Chief of the First Division of the General Department in the Ministry of War.

The granting of a constitution by Frederick William II in 1850 brought further problems and complications. In surrendering part of his civilian authority, the King was all the more resolved to maintain his grip upon the real sources of his power, above all, the absolute control of the officer corps and the army as a whole. Any appearance of even a qualification of that absolute control must be strictly avoided. As Bismarck wrote to the

old Emperor (Feb. 24, 1883): "Any attempt to seek the favor of the diet that does not maintain the independence of the Royal Command above all possible doubt must impress upon your majesty's army the idea of depending more or less upon the good will of parliament, to a degree which the constitution itself does not necessitate . . . All other institutions can better appear dependent upon the favor of parliament; in the case of the army, however, even the semblance, as if its representatives were trying to curry the favor of parliament by appeal and artificial maneuvers, must in my opinion be strictly avoided."

The unfortunate victim of this state of affairs was again the Minister of War. The King's personal servant, and what was more, confidential military adviser, he found himself at the same time a constitutional organ, forced to secure the diet's assent to his budget and responsible to it for its employment. Strive as he might, the Minister of War found these two conflicting obligations, irreconcilable, and himself the object of the recriminations on both sides. On top of this, because of his dependence upon the Reichstag he was no longer considered a free agent of the Crown. As a result he was reduced to the role of a mere parliamentary screen and administrative figurehead, behind which the monarch and his advisers strove to preserve the royal power of command free from any shadow of parliamentary influence. By an order of January 18, 1861, all royal orders were sharply divided into those dealing with matters falling within the Royal Command and those affected by the parliamentary budget, and the first were expressly withdrawn from the minister's constitutional countersignature. At the same time the *Militär-Kabinet*, as the executive organ of the Royal Command, under the leadership of a series of outstanding capable men such as Manteuffel and Albedyll freed itself gradually from the control which the minister still exercised over it, until in March 1883 a Royal Order finally confirmed its emancipation by enjoining the minister and the Chief of the Military Cabinet in future to keep in closer touch upon a basis of complete and unqualified equality.

II

No less fatal to the authority of the Minister of War was the rise of the Chief of the General Staff to a position not only of equality, but in time of war, of predominance over the minister, as the result of the exigencies of modern warfare, the personal genius of Moltke and the victories of 1864, 1866 and 1870-71.

The system, first inaugurated in 1866 and finally consolidated in 1870-71, by which the Chief of General Staff, as the Strategic Adviser to the King as commander in chief virtually controlled the entire conduct of operation was an immense advance over the confusion of opinion and responsibility that had reigned in the royal headquarters before Jena and Auerstadt and even during the Wars of Liberation. But this advance was achieved only at the price of isolating the conduct of operations from all connections with the other aspects of the war effort, and thus creating new sources of friction. In the conferences in which Moltke daily submitted his suggestions to the King, often late in the night, when new developments made immediate decisions necessary, neither the Minister of War nor the Chancellor participated. The result was that Roon, although accompanying headquarters in order to direct the entire replenishment and supply system, was without influence upon or even knowledge of the decisions taken. Even Bismarck was forced to conduct the war politically and diplomatically without being informed of current operations until they had been brought to a conclusion. In view of the acute danger of an intervention by other powers, the menace and the consequences of which Bismarck alone was fully conscious, this most unsatisfactory state of affairs proved a heavy strain upon his nerves. After a series of preliminary brushes it resulted in a head-on conflict with Moltke, in which the King took his Chancellor's side. Moltke for a moment was inclined to resign in the midst of the campaign. Although he finally accepted the King's decision without remonstrance, the conflict broke up forever the cordial relations that had hitherto existed between Moltke and Bismarck. Each tried to vindicate posthumously the position he had taken: Moltke in his essay "On Strategy," Bismarck in his "Reminiscences." Nevertheless, so great was the power of patriotic fiction that these discrepancies were covered up and this system of the Triumvirate, in which the Chancellor and the Chief of the General Staff, under the supreme authority of the King, conducted the political and military sides of the war in practically watertight compartments, was extolled as an ideal solution.

No less difficult was the rearrangement of the relations of the Chief of the General Staff to the Minister of War after peace had been restored. After 1871 Moltke was the first man in the army next to the Emperor himself. Yet nominally he was still a subordinate of the Minister, even the custom that his audiences with

the Emperor had to take place in the presence of the Minister was revived. Moltke personally did not mind this. He knew that his merit far outweighed any nominal restrictions of his position, and his courteous relations with Roon, based upon mutual respect, kept all friction down. But Waldersee, looking beyond Moltke to his own prospective tenure, thought otherwise. At his instigation, Moltke finally in 1882 was induced to ask for and was granted the right of regular and direct audience in matters relating to his office, and this finally established the autonomy of the Chief of the General Staff directly under the King.

Thus under the system finally consolidated in 1883 and from that time onwards unchanged until the collapse of the monarchy and the Old Army in November 1918, the Chief of the Military Cabinet was in charge of all matters concerning the officers' corps; the Minister of War was in charge of the organization, equipment, training and mobilization of the forces; the Chief of the General Staff was responsible for the great maneuvers and war plans. In reality, however, the system was far more complicated, at times verging upon anarchy. One constant source of uncertainty was the monarch's ever-active personal interest and unpredictable interference in all army matters: equipment, fortifications, regulations. In addition, the interests and responsibilities of all three executives overlapped each other in a most disconcerting manner. Appointments were jealously guarded as its special preserve by the *Militär-Kabinett*, granting neither the Minister of War nor the Chief of the General Staff any influence whatsoever, except in the choice of their immediate personnel. Equipment and organization were decided in a tug of war between the Ministry, the respective inspectors general (of the infantry, cavalry, field and heavy artillery, pioneers and engineers, etc.) and the Chief of the General Staff. Regulations were primarily the affair of the Minister, who issued them over the royal signature, but in their formulation the General Staff often had a greater share. In actual training, the influence of the inspectors general and the *Militär-Kabinett* (through the appointment of the higher commanders) predominated; the Chief of the General Staff being restricted to making his influence felt through his organization of the *Kaisermanöver* and through the printed commentaries on them issued by the General Staff section in charge.

Particularly complicated was the problem of mobilization. Mobilization proper, that is the concentration of reservists with

and the establishment of wartime units, was the work of the Ministry, although the General Staff expressed its wishes. The disposition of the forces so assembled (*Aufmarsch*): their distribution into armies, their transport to the frontiers, the equipment and garrisoning of fortresses, the organization of a special frontier force during the critical first days, was the work of the Second (Operations) Section of the General Staff, which had taken over these functions from the Railway Section in 1882. The Railway Section, however, remained in charge of the technical aspects of transportation both with respect to mobilization and the initial concentration. In order to facilitate the working of this complicated machinery, the officer in charge of mobilization at the War Ministry was regularly a former general staff officer. The Chief of the Railway Section was in the ambiguous position of being a representative of the Minister of War in all matters concerning military transport and at the same time a subordinate of the Chief of the General Staff.

To add to these complications considerable personal friction existed between the members of the General Staff and of the officers of the Ministry of War. The General Staff, members of a closely knit body recruited through a severe process of selection, looked down upon the Ministry of War, charged its members with pedantry, and criticized the slowness of their methods.

The officers of the Ministry, who often enjoyed greater responsibility and longer tenure of office than their comrades of the General Staff, retaliated by pointing to the highly erratic methods of the staff, where office holders were changed brusquely and successors not infrequently reversed the stand taken by their predecessors.

The friction between the three chief executives was further increased by the fact that the Minister of War represented both the *Militär-Kabinett* and the Chief of the General Staff before the Reichstag. The result was that he had often to assume constitutional responsibility for actions, in the decisions of which he had had no voice. This was particularly the case with the appointments of the *Militär-Kabinett*, which not infrequently was attacked in the diet; less so in the case of the Chief of the General Staff, whose name and activities were to an extent kept out of the limelight. On the other hand, this had the great inconvenience that the Chief of the General Staff, as the officer responsible for the military preparation, was unable to press his demands in person, having to gain the Minister's consent to all

his proposals in order to have them put before the diet. This unhappy state of affairs, in which one side was constantly reduced to pressing its demands, while the other attempted to raise the funds for them worked without undue irritation largely because of the conciliatory nature of Schlieffen and the younger Moltke. When an energetic personality like Ludendorff became head of the Operations Section, the conflict became acute, ending in 1913 with his transfer to the command of a regiment in Düsseldorf.

III

All these weaknesses and contradictions in the supreme co-ordination and direction of the German military machinery made themselves felt from the first moment of the First World War onward.

At the outbreak of that conflict the Kaiser in accordance with the system of the Triumvirate developed under his grandfather, personally assumed supreme control of the entire direction of the war as *Oberste Heeresleitung* or OHL.¹ Under that nominal command the two chiefs of the General and Admiralty Staffs functioned ostensibly as his advisers, *de facto* as responsible directors of land and naval operations respectively. The Chancellor as head of the entire civilian administration, including the diplomatic conduct of the war, joined Imperial Headquarters as did the fourth leading figure, the Minister of War (Falkenhayn), despite the experiences of 1870-71 and the elder Moltke's express statement (1881) that his proper place was in the capital.

The attempt to reconcile the Kaiser's traditional powers and prerogatives with the direction of a modern conflict broke down almost from the outset as much the result of its inner contradictions as of the personalities concerned.

Under William I the monarch's supreme command had been a reality, even if most of the time it expressed itself merely in assenting to the proposals of his trusted servants. The conflicts of 1866 and 1870-71 had been brief, limited, and confined almost exclusively to land operations. Coordination of these and of the political-diplomatic conduct of the war had presented relatively simple problems and where, as between Bismarck and Moltke, the clash of personalities led to open conflict, the King's author-

¹Under the impression of the virtual self-effacement of the Kaiser during the World War this original meaning of the OHL became practically lost in German military discussions; the successive Chiefs of the General Staff, being referred to as the First, Second, Third OHL. While convenient and substantially correct, this usage tends to obscure the constitutional fiction of the Kaiser's personal command which contributed so fatally to undermine the supreme coordination of the German war effort during the First World War.

ity had been sufficient to ensure at least outward agreement between the two.

Under his grandson everything had become vastly more complicated and difficult. Contrary to all hopes and expectations the First World War developed into a long drawn desperate struggle which imposed undreamed of problems of expansion and complication of efforts on the German armed forces.

Army and Navy for the first time stood side by side without any experience in or machinery for the integration of their efforts other than their common allegiance to the commander in chief. The vast demands in manpower and material brought about by the transformation of the struggle from a swift war of movement into a prolonged deadlock in the trenches raised wholly unforeseen problems of the mass-mobilization of the entire resources of the nation and of its coordination with the general strategy of the war. The integration of the military and political direction of the war, so difficult to assure even under the essentially simple conditions of 1866 and 1870-71, became a hundred times more complicated in a war of coalitions that arraigned the forces of the entire world against each other.

The Kaiser's person alone held all conflicting spheres, forces, and personalities together. But unlike his grandfather he failed to make his nominal authority a reality. Outwardly the fiction that the supreme decision lay in his hands was carefully preserved. No decision of any magnitude was taken without being submitted to him, and during the rare periods that he was absent from Imperial Headquarters, a special officer of the General Staff kept him informed. But all this was purely nominal. In reality the Kaiser restricted himself from the outset to little more than the role of an onlooker, leaving the conduct of affairs in the hands of his advisers and confining his active intervention to acute crises. The dismissal of Falkenhayn from the post of Chief of Staff in August 1916 and his replacement by Hindenburg-Ludendorff was perhaps the last act of decisive influence upon the course of the war exercised by him. Thereafter the irreplaceability of these two at the head of the operations made them the virtual dictators of the country. The nominal authority of the sovereign and commander in chief paled to such an extent, that he was no longer even able to hold his chancellors against their will.²

²"And the Supreme Commander?" wrote Seeckt in the margin of an address pronounced by Ludendorff on the occasion of Hindenburg's seventieth birthday in which he found the sentence "In this situation the Chief of the General Staff will see himself faced with decisions of immense significance." Rabenau, *Seeckt*, I, p. 617.

This complete self-effacement of the Kaiser proved all the more fatal in the absence of any personality or institution capable of replacing him in his functions as supreme coordinator of the war effort. The Chancellor was head of the government. But even in time of peace he had no authority over the armed forces and exercised but a very restricted influence over their administrative representatives, the Prussian Minister for War and the Reich Secretary of State for the Navy, although both were nominally under his authority. In fact in his struggle with Tirpitz over the Anglo-German naval rivalry Bethmann-Hollweg had definitely come out second best. Above all, depending entirely upon the Kaiser's personal favor, the Chancellor had no power of his own based upon a parliamentary majority and a united cabinet to back and support him. Nor could he, a mere civilian, be placed in a position of command over the armed services. Even the establishment of a *military* commander in chief coordinating the conduct of operations under the Kaiser's supreme authority was deemed inadmissible by Falkenhayn as an encroachment upon the power of the monarch to decide personally between his servants.

Probably the best solution in these circumstances would have been the establishment under the Kaiser as Chairman of a War Board (*Oberste Kriegsleitung*) composed of the Chancellor, the two Chiefs of Staff, and the two administrative heads of the army and navy. Such a board would have been able to achieve within itself the necessary coordination between army and navy, strategy and supply, strategy and policy. Restricting itself to the overall coordination and direction of the war effort and delegating the actual conduct of operations in the field to commanders in chief appointed for the various theaters of war, it could have avoided the combination of the two that proved so great a drag upon the effective functioning of the OHL. Finally, taking its seat in the capital, it would have been free from following the peregrinations of the High Commands and would have avoided the tearing a part of the governmental machinery; some members of which joined Imperial Headquarters temporarily (Minister of War) or permanently (Secretary for the Navy) while others, like the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, were forced by their conflicting duties to shuttle between the capital and headquarters.

Such coordinating influence as remained in this almost anarchical setup, tended inevitably to pass into the hands of the only

member of the Triumvirate who continued to function, if not wholly successfully, at least efficiently: the Chief of the General Staff. The younger Moltke broke down completely after the collapse of his plans in the battle of the Marne six weeks after the outbreak of the conflict; but his successor, the Minister of War Falkenhayn, who took over from him at the height of that crisis, was an altogether different figure. A relatively young man of exceptional ability and unbounded ambition, he took the highest possible view of his new post. While admitting that the real head of the OHL was the Kaiser and that the Chief of the General Staff had merely been authorized by him to issue operative orders in his name, he contended that the Chief of General Staff, as official representative of the supreme commander, had become the real executive holder of the powers of the OHL. In any case he was the only one responsible for its actions.

These powers so he claimed, found their limits only in the constitutional rights of the other leading offices, the political direction of the Chancellor, the administration of the army by the Minister of War. Such formal separation did not mean however that the Chief of Staff could disinterest himself in those matters, least of all in the political conduct of the war. As regarded the relations between the two Chiefs of Staff (Army and Navy), Falkenhayn recognized their equality but claimed that this was qualified by the tacit understanding that in case of conflict the army should prevail over the navy.

These claims on the part of the Chief of the General Staff in virtue of his position as the official representative of the supreme commander, went far beyond the independence to conduct operations free from the influence of the political leader which was all that Moltke had claimed during and after 1870-71. That Falkenhayn was able to put them forward and make them good was a matter of personalities, but even more so of the difference in the general situation. In 1870-71 the success of the German arms had never been seriously in question for a single moment. During the First World War it hung perilously in the balance throughout the entire conflict and there was no moment in which the fate of country and nation did not depend entirely upon the Chief of Staff's ability to win, or at least not to lose, the war or land. In addition, Falkenhayn's peculiar combination of strategic and diplomatic gifts fitted him for such difficult tasks as the negotiation for the entry of Turkey into the war in the autumn of 1914, the preservation of Italian neutrality during that winter.

and the diplomatic and military preparation of the joint German-Austrian-Bulgarian campaign against Serbia in the autumn of 1915.³

If nevertheless his coordinative influence remained limited and fitful it was due to the fact that he never succeeded in consolidating his basic position. Brilliant as his career had been, it had not succeeded in obliterating the distrust aroused by a somewhat doubtful beginning. Many were inclined to look upon him as a dangerous gambler, while his cool, sarcastic, superior manner did not add to his popularity, least of all in the General Staff which was inclined to consider him an outsider. To offset this fundamental weakness he had neither the authority of rank, or age, or outstanding achievement. A mere lieutenant general of 54 when he was abruptly called to the supreme direction of military operations, Falkenhayn saw himself from the outset constrained to tread warily in imposing his authority upon the army commanders, nearly all of whom were greatly superior to him in all these respects. Particularly delicate and unfortunate were his relations with the Eastern Duumvirate of Hindenburg—Ludendorff whose achievements and popularity far over-shadowed his own and whom many, as he knew well, would have preferred to see in his place.

His desperate efforts to balance their overshadowing prestige by signal successes of his own led him into the bloody repulse of the first battle of Ypres, which further tended to undermine both his external position and his self-confidence. Around the turning of the year 1914-15, he was able indeed to resist the pressure of his enemies for his removal and during that year his undeniable successes in the great offensive in Poland and the Serbian campaign went a long way in restoring both his prestige and his equilibrium. But whatever he had gained was lost the following year by the ill-advised attack upon Verdun, and above all, by his refusal to abandon it when it had failed. The entry of Rumania into the war in August 1916 finally overthrew his long-tottering position.⁴

From the outset the new men who replaced him at the head of the OHL enjoyed all the advantages Falkenhayn had lacked: Hindenburg's rank, age, and imperturbable calm matched with

³Seeckt, who at that time (Oct. 1915) saw in Falkenhayn the future reorganizer of the Reich, even believed that he might replace Bethmann-Hollweg altogether and unite in his hands the functions of Chancellor and Chief of the General Staff. Rabenau, *Seeckt*, I, pp. 249-251

⁴A most enlightening analysis of these psychological difficulties in Falkenhayn's personality and position is to be found in the sketch of Lieut. Col. Solger in *Heerführer des Weltkrieges* (Berlin, 1939) pp. 72-101.

Ludendorff's boundless self-confidence and energy. Both together enjoyed the prestige of outstanding and unique successes, the full confidence of the army, and the full trust of the nation. The longer the war dragged on, the more the German people placed all their hopes for a final victory upon these two men, whose efforts until the fatal days of July 1918 appeared outwardly as an uninterrupted series of successes.

So great became their hold over the affections of the nation that it began to overshadow even the authority of the sovereign himself. Hitherto the Kaiser's effacement had been of his own free will, from a reluctance to interfere. Now he rapidly came to the point where he found himself unable to make his will prevail against those of his two redoubtable servants even when he wished to. He had called them into office, but he could not dismiss them as he had done with Moltke and Falkenhayn, without precipitating a psychological crisis of unpredictable consequences. However much he outwardly tried to preserve his imperial authority, he was only too well aware that *de facto* he was forced to give way whenever the two pressed a claim with the threat of their resignation.

Thus without any change in the external set up, the third OHL developed into a virtual military dictatorship exercised by Ludendorff under the protecting cloak of Hindenburg's authority. The Kaiser continued to receive daily reports on the military situation by Ludendorff in the presence of the Field Marshal; but he was unable to withhold his assent from their decisions. He continued to dismiss and appoint Chancellors and other high civilian dignitaries; but he was unable to hold them if the Chief of the General Staff and his aide refused to cooperate with them, and he was forced to conform to their wishes and predilections in the choice of successors. Not until the signal breakdown of their offensive in the summer of 1918 had shattered the nimbus of unbroken success that had surrounded all their actions and Ludendorff's nervous collapse broke the spell of his domineering personality, was the new parliamentary government of Prince Max of Baden able to bring about Ludendorff's dismissal just before the final catastrophe. Hindenburg, however, stayed on, and while the Kaiser lost both his throne and his hold on his people, Hindenburg carried his capital of affection undiminished into the Republic.

In these circumstances the measure of effective coordination achieved in the First World War by the Second and Third OHL

could not but remain arbitrary and fitful. Coordination between strategy and supply was profoundly hampered by the wholly unequal preparation in the two fields. While Moltke and Schlieffen had bent all their energies towards the training of the General Staff in the conduct of a modern mass conflict, the successive ministers of war had failed to provide for that contingency. Antiquated and bureaucratic, the machinery of the Ministry of War was totally unprepared to cope with the wholly new industrial warfare, accentuated for Germany by the Allied blockade, and the necessity of adapting her program of production to a steadily dwindling supply of basic materials. Through the initiative of civilian outsiders like Walther Rathenau and Wichard von Moellendorff in collaboration with a small group of outstanding soldiers, Groener, Coupette, and Koeth, the necessary machinery was gradually improvised. Part of it was loosely attached to the Ministry itself in the *Kriegs-Amt* under Groener, the former Chief of Military Transportation, comprising as main departments the *Wumba*, or Production Office, under Coupette and the Raw Materials Office, founded by Rathenau, under Koeth, partly in the loose form of semi-independent societies controlled by representatives of the *Kriegs-Amt* chosen to facilitate the co-operation of such divergent elements as businessmen, politicians, civil servants, and military officials.

That this vast process of adaptation and expansion was carried through with comparatively little friction between OHL and the War Ministry was due largely to Falkenhayn's anxiety to avoid anything that might diminish the authority of the Ministry. During the first four months of his tenure he even kept both offices in his own hand, believing that the new conditions made personal coordination vitally necessary. In the long run, however, even he had to admit that no single man was able to combine the direction of the OHL with that of the War Ministry, and in January of the following year he gave way to Bethmann-Hollweg's pressure and relinquished the Ministry into the hands of Wild von Hohenborn. Since Hohenborn remained, however, in Imperial Headquarters as one of Falkenhayn's few confidential advisers, the cooperation between the two agencies was hardly affected.

With Falkenhayn's fall, Wild von Hohenborn also disappeared, his place being taken by General von Stein whose return to Berlin broke up the cooperation between the agencies without in any way assuring the independence of the Ministry. For the

power of the Third OHL was overwhelming and unlike Falkenhayn, Ludendorff had no inhibitions about using it to impose his own and his collaborators' will. In vain did the representatives of the Ministry struggle to maintain their independence. In vain they protested against OHL's ignorance of conditions on the home front. In vain they begged for permission to send a special liaison officer of their own to Imperial Headquarters. So low had their prestige fallen that some of Ludendorff's collaborators did not even find it necessary to obtain his approval for the peremptory demands they made in his name. In individual cases of flagrant infraction of rules formal redress was sometimes obtained, but this did not affect the fundamental fact that by the end of the First World War, the Third OHL had reduced the Ministry of War from a position of equality to one in which it had to carry out the barely veiled orders of the General Staff and to press its commands through the Reichstag.

IV

The collapse of the Imperial Army in the Revolution swept aside its entire system. With the flight of the monarch to Holland its traditional foundations were irretrievably shattered. The OHL continued to function under Hindenburg and Groener, first in Kassel, and later in Kolberg. But it was a lifeless institution, and its final dissolution in the summer of 1919 passed almost unnoticed.

The new Reichswehr, which, under the hands of the new Reich's Minister of War, Noske, and last Prussian Minister of War, Reinhardt, was meanwhile gradually emerging from the ashes of the Old Army, had to be organized on entirely new foundations and new lines. According to the intention of the Allies it should have been a loosely centralized force composed of two practically autonomous group commands under a purely administrative ministry. As we show in another place, it was primarily and predominantly the work of Seeckt that this intention was completely unrealized. The new force instead was given in the *Chef der Heeresleitung* a concentration of coordination and command such as the Old Army had not known since the days of Frederick the Great.

This idea of the absolute concentration of all power and functions; policy, command, administration, selection, training, research, planning in the hands of a single general at the head of the Reichswehr did not come to Seeckt in a brilliant flash of in-

spiration. From the memoranda published by his biographer we can see how gradually it took shape during the summer of 1919 and how slowly he succeeded in winning Reinhardt, Noske, and the government over to it. From the formal acceptance it was still a long way to full endorsement by the government, and years more passed until all opposition abroad had finally died down. That it was eventually carried through in the teeth of all domestic and foreign opposition was entirely due to the accident that removed Reinhardt from the *Heeresleitung* and placed Seeckt in the position he had theoretically sketched out, and gave his domineering personality the opportunity of bringing it to life.

The *Chef der Heeresleitung*, as he emerged under Seeckt's hands from 1920 to 1926, was the direct heir and successor of the former Chief of the General Staff. For Seeckt was not only the very essence and prototype of the old General Staff tradition, he had also been appointed in July 1919 the last acting chief of that institution, charged with its official liquidation under the Treaty of Versailles and its transformation into the new *Truppen-Amt* of which he had been (from October 1919 to the Kapp Putsch) the first chief. And when Seeckt passed on to the *Heeresleitung* he took the tradition, spirit and function of the Chief of the General Staff over into that office. But if in the letter and in the spirit, the *Chef der Heeresleitung* was heir to the tradition of the General Staff, his powers were incomparably larger and (in his sphere) practically absolute. He was no longer merely the representative of another but supreme commander in his own right, in peace as well as in war, absolute master of the entire military machine from the selection of the recruits to the strategic training of leaders. Thus he was able to achieve what Schlieffen had deemed the highest boon for any commander: to be able to organize and train himself the army he was to lead into the field of battle.

The corollary of this development of the Chief of the General Staff into the *Chef der Heeresleitung* was the corresponding expansion of the activities and the influence of the General Staff itself. Already during the First World War the new demands in such spheres as economic mobilization and psychological warfare had shown the necessity of expanding the General Staff's outlook and functions beyond the problems of tactical and operational planning to which it had been almost exclusively confined prior to 1914. Now, Seeckt made the General Staff into the central executive body, through which the *Chef der Heeresleitung*

would be able to make his will felt throughout the whole force. Under his leadership the General Staff permeated and dominated the War Ministry until it had achieved complete control of the entire machinery. On the other hand, this expansion of the General Staff beyond its original functions prepared the way for the subsequent separation of these two activities: the General Staff as the central executive and coordinating organ of the *Chef der Heeresleitung* developing into the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, while the *Truppen-Amt* or General Staff proper was reduced to the position of a planning organ for the new army.

In Seeckt's eyes this concentration of the entire control of military affairs in the hands of the *Chef der Heeresleitung* was more than a matter of mere expediency. He saw it as the revival and continuation of that tradition of personal command upon which, as he was never tired of pointing out, the cohesion of the imperial army had rested. Now that the monarch was temporarily in abeyance, the place left empty by him was to be taken by the *Chef der Heeresleitung* who was to be incomparably more than a mere commander of the Reichswehr. He was the personal center of its blind allegiance, the object of the soldier's admiration and devotion, the supreme authority in every respect.

We have seen above how this attempt on Seeckt's part to concentrate in his own person the supreme authority as well as the entire leadership of the Reichswehr was struck a fatal blow when the death of Ebert brought Hindenburg into the presidency. In the person of the old Marshal, combining the traditions of the Old Army and of the First World War with the prestige of the President and Commander in Chief, the Reichswehr found a new center of allegiance until Hindenburg's death in August 1934 dissolved that bond. Even Seeckt preferred to resign without a struggle in 1926 rather than pursue a course that might bring him into open opposition with the Field Marshal.

Among Seeckt's successors none ever regained the plentitude of powers which he had wielded. Under his colorless successor—Heye (1926-1931), the leadership of the Reichswehr passed to Groener who had replaced Gessler as Minister of War. But Groener's hold never approached Seeckt's and in the course of time was further undermined by his illness, his preoccupation with the Home Ministry (autumn 1931 to summer 1932), and Schleicher's intrigues.

Finally, after his disastrous breakdown in the Reichstag during a speech defending the banning of Nazi uniforms, Schleicher

and Hammerstein (who had succeeded Heye in the *Heeresleitung* 1931-1934) were able to force Groener's resignation by the categorical statement that the Reichswehr no longer stood behind him. Schleicher's brief and stormy period as Minister of War (June 1932 to January 1933) owed its main strength to Hammerstein's unshakable loyalty and friendship, but when, in January of the following year, the old Marshal suddenly withdrew his confidence from Schleicher and appointed Adolf Hitler Chancellor, Hammerstein had no other course than to submit. Under the new regime leadership became again divided between Blomberg as Minister of War (then Adolf Hitler's chief henchman among the generals) and Hammerstein and (from February 1934 to February 1938) Fritsch at the head of the *Heeresleitung*, representing the Army and the mass of senior officers.

V

The *coup d'état* of February 4, 1938, ended this period of confused and conflicting authority by reestablishing the absolute concentration of authority in the Führer himself. By assuming direct personal command (*unmittelbarer Oberbefehl*), Adolf Hitler fused the nominal supreme command (*oberste Befehlsgewalt*) which he had held since Hindenburg's death with Blomberg's authority as Minister of War and Fritsch's leadership of the army. Fritsch's successor, Brauchitsch, was reduced to the position of an executive officer.

Simultaneously with this consolidation of supreme personal command in the hands of the Führer, the entire topheavy machinery of the Ministry of War was completely reorganized and divided between the new supreme coordinating agency of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* and the three executive commands of Army, Navy, and Air Force.

In the *Oberkommando*, or OKW for short, the German Army has been given a special coordinating organ designed to overcome those weaknesses in the supreme institutional setup which contributed signally to the German defeat in 1918. Its purposes are to ensure the closest possible integration of the Führer's political and military leadership, to coordinate the overall strategy of the three services as well as the organizations charged with military supply and total mobilization. To that end the OKW combines in itself many functions. It serves as an executive and advisory organ of the Führer in the exercise of his personal command with a special liaison staff under General Jodl, its Deputy

Chief of Staff. It acts as a supreme administrative agency (Ministry of War) dealing with the bulk of administrative tasks involving all three services, including the sections for psychological warfare and the central directive section for military research; as a supergeneral staff (*Wehrmachtsstab*) entrusted with the strategic coordination of the three services; and finally as a Ministry for Defense, combining in the (*Wehrwirtschaftsstab*) the supreme coordination of military supplies (*Rüstungs-Amt*) and general mobilization and direction (*Wehrwirtschafts-Amt*) of the economic war effort. Thus while the Führer with the assistance of his personal staff is able to coordinate the supreme political, diplomatic, and military direction of the war effort, his Chief of Staff, Keitel, controls the entire military machinery administratively, strategically, economically.

Under the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, the *Oberkommandos des Heeres*, *der Marine*, and *der Luftwaffe* continue to function for their own particular domains each with its special command, general staff, and training and research institutions. Thus one part of the General Staff has developed into the new supreme coordinating agency of the *Oberkommando* and the other has been reduced to its original functions as the planning organ of the army. This has reduced the Chief of the General Staff from his former position as representative of the sovereign and virtual commander in chief to the role of strategic adviser to the commander of the land forces, although the decisive role of that adviser in the German war effort has still assured to him a much greater importance than that exercised by his colleagues of the naval and air staffs. Compared with the First World War the new organization of the German High Command has re-established personal coordination of the supreme political and military direction of the war effort in the hands of the Führer. The extent and the forms in which that coordination has been exercised have deliberately been left open and have varied markedly with the different phases of the war but its influence has been an important factor on the German side.

Secondly, it has established in the *Oberkommando* a supreme coordinating organ or *Kriegsleitung*, capable of ensuring the technical integration of the three services in the overall strategy of the war (the best instance of which was the Norwegian campaign), as well as the coordination of this overall strategy with the general organization and planning of the economic war effort, controlled under the *Wehrwirtschaftsstab* by representa-

tives in all key positions of transport and agricultural and industrial production, as well as by regional and local coordinating officers directing production down to the individual factory.

Thirdly, it has clearly separated this function of the overall strategic and economic planning and coordination from that of the actual planning and direction of operations vested in the Army, Navy and Air commands, thus avoiding the confusing of the two that proved so severe a handicap to Falkenhayn and even more so to Ludendorff.⁴

Finally, by establishing this organization in peacetime, Germany avoided the dislocations experienced in 1914 in passing from a peacetime to a wartime basis. In the crises that preceded the invasion of Poland it was tested and perfected.

Thus at the outbreak of the conflict only one major coordinating institution had to be added: the establishment of a special committee (*Ministerat für Reichsverteidigung*) of the Supreme Defense Council. This committee under the chairmanship of Goering has been composed of Keitel as head of the OKW, Frick as administrative commissioner general, Funk as economic commissioner general, as well as of the permanent directors of the Führer's President's Office and Chancellery. It has been entrusted with the supreme executive authority over the civil war administration—including the Protectorate of Bohemia and the Government General in Warsaw, but excluding the occupied territories. Its purpose is to coordinate the civilian and military war efforts and relieve the Führer from all tasks not directly concerned with the political and military direction of the war.

In those forms the supreme organization and direction of the German war machine has functioned down to the present day, although the influence of its various components has shifted with the course of the war. The one innovation of outstanding importance has been the creation, in February 1942, of a special ministry of armaments and production under the Nazi architect and engineer, Professor Speer, and the transfer to it from the *Oberkommando* of the *Rüstungs-Amt*. This seeming infraction of the principle of the coordination of strategy and economic planning in the *Oberkommando* has since revealed itself as a tremendous effort to meet the steadily mounting demands of the war in Russia through a systematic drive for the reorganization, rationalization, and standardization of war production.

⁴The reorganization of the supreme direction of the Wehrmacht of 1938 was foreshadowed even in detail by Ludendorff in his *Total War* (1935), pp. 111-112.

Chapter Eight

THE GENERAL STAFF SYSTEM

I

The Prussian General Staff system as it was finally consolidated under Moltke in the decades after 1871, rested upon three main pillars: first, an extraordinarily hard training and severe process of selection; second, a training not only for technical assistance but for intelligent cooperation in the higher conduct of operations; third, a wholly unbureaucratic spirit and procedure. This training and selection began with the competition for admission to the Military Academy. Founded originally by Scharnhorst as a military counterpart to Berlin University, the Military Academy had prior to 1870 functioned more as a general institution of higher military training than as a preparatory school for General Staff officers. Many officers had sought admission to it solely with the purpose of spending a few pleasant and profitable years in the capital and then returning to their regiments.

With the consolidation, after 1870, of the higher military training and leadership in the General Staff, the Academy naturally was affected. Its transfer in 1872 from the control of the Inspector of Military Education to that of the Chief of the General Staff did not greatly affect its formal organization. Both Moltke and Schlieffen realized the vital importance of a general intellectual culture in the future military leaders. Schlieffen in particular took special interest in the work of the Academy and strenuously resisted all proposals for transforming it into a purely technical school for staff training.

Nevertheless its close coordination with the General Staff profoundly affected its outlook and teaching. As the Academy had no specifically appointed teachers of its own, the teaching was done by officers of the Great General Staff in addition to their normal duties. Many of the most famous names of General Staff officers of that period appear in that function: York, Hindenburg, Bernhardi, Freytag-Loringhoven, Stein and Ludendorff.

These officers could draw for their inspiration upon their own

immediate experience and work, and their work also had the effect of concentrating their teaching specifically on those issues with which they were in daily contact. Only a few, like Freytag-Loringhoven, were broad enough in their interests to escape this. The result was that in practice the training of the Academy tended more and more to narrow down into pure staff technique and, narrower still, into the technical conduct of those large-scale operations which the General Staff had come to consider as its special preserve. "The exercises at the Military Academy," writes one of its pupils, who passed through it early in this century, "were most interesting, at times absolutely fascinating, but did not concern themselves in the least with the technique of the conduct of battles. No order that would have been given *in* combat was ever discussed, hardly even a real order *for* combat; it all turned around the 'operational element,' around the question, whether to move forwards or backwards, or to the side, whether to envelop right or left (also whether one should execute an order, or deviate from it). That in a division there occurred artillery orders, that with an army corps it was necessary to think of the 'means of communication,' those were all technical details practically never touched upon at all."¹

This onesided concentration upon mere operational technique was still further accentuated by the replacement of general military theory, on which the generation that had won the wars of unification had schooled themselves, by the "applicatory method" rediscovered by Verdy du Vernois in the early 70's. Bernhardi, who gives a most vivid picture of the dreariness and fundamental error of that method (the use of selected campaigns of the past as case studies for the application of modern concepts and methods without regard to the totally different basic conditions)² contributed a good deal to the improvement of teaching of military history around the turn of the century. So did Freytag-Loringhoven, but all their efforts were not enough to balance the concentration in favor of a broader and more balanced general survey of military matters.

Small wonder that in these circumstances many of the ablest leaders of the army became more and more skeptical of the value of the training provided by the Academy, and that a man like Field Marshal Haeseler could say to a lieutenant who wished to compete for admission: "What do you want to do there? In those

¹General Marx. "Über Schlieffen-Geist und Haeseler-Geist," in *Militär Wochenblatt* No. 12 (1934) pp. 445-446

²Bernhardi, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, p. 63.

three years you can learn much that will be of use to you in war and you can get into the General Staff by other means as well.”³

With this last observation Haeseler had touched the other important factor in the gradual transformation of the Military Academy. Contrary to his optimistic statement, the Academy from 1870 onwards tended to become the sole means of access to the General Staff. In theory it was possible to be “commandeered” to the General Staff without passing through the Academy, as Schlieffen, Mackensen, and Einem had been. But this was done less and less often and under the younger Moltke it stopped altogether. And even when an outsider thus succeeded in being “commandeered” to the General Staff, he still had to meet the no less severe competition for final selection. In this competition the outsider was at a marked disadvantage compared with the man who had passed through the Academy. This was not because of any prejudices in favor of Academy men on the part of the selectors, for the whole process of selection for the General Staff was singularly free from subjective influences; but because at the Academy the officer acquired a systematic training and command of technique which those who had not gone through it were usually unable to acquire.

Thus the normal way to the coveted “wine-red stripes,” denoting the General Staff officer, went through the Academy with the result that the struggle for admission to it became ever fiercer, until finally towards 1914 many hundreds competed for the few more than a hundred places open each year. Competition was by written exercises, mostly of a tactical nature. Because of their privileged position in or near the capital, with its exceptional opportunities for instruction and the general high standards of their officers’ corps, the Guards tended to win a disproportionate number of entries. To prevent this the papers were made anonymous—with the unexpected results that the Guard officers increased their ascendancy still further, and continued to maintain it, despite the tendency to apply a sharper standard of criticism to their applications than to others.⁴

Favoritism was, as far as humanly possible, rigidly excluded. Even the Kaiser for once seems to have curbed his impulsive

³General Marx, *Ibid.*, p. 444

⁴It is to this high percentage of Guards officers entering the Military Academy and through it the General Staff that the strong aristocratic element in the latter (1913 145 noble to 125 officers of non-aristocratic birth) must be attributed. For, in contrast to the rest of the army, aristocratic birth played a very small role in the selection of General Staff officers. Van den Bergh: *Des deutsche Heer vor dem Weltkrieg*, p. 104

wishes. Except for the single time in which he interceded for the son of one of his oldest servants and friends, Stein could recall no instance of his interference over a period of many years.

At the end of the three years of the Academy stood another competitive examination. Only this time personal factors, such as character, general education, manners, personality, played a role, in addition to pure military merit. As a result out of more than a hundred men who had gained admission to the Academy in the first competition, perhaps thirty per cent passed through this second test into the next stage, "command to the Great General Staff" normally for a period of two years.

The others found employment according to their qualifications, some, the best, in the so-called *hohere adjutantur*, the Higher Staff (*not* General Staff) Service, or perhaps as teachers in an Officers' School, others simply in regular line service. As no amount of fairness and care in the selection could ensure that mistakes might not occur, rejection did not automatically exclude an officer forever from the General Staff career. By exceptional service in the line he might prove his merit and be called directly into the General Staff (as Stein was for instance). Under the younger Moltke, however, this method for the subsequent correcting of patent errors was practically discontinued, thus creating another obstacle in the arduous path to the General Staff and channeling the selection of its officers into an ever tighter funnel.

Those fortunates who had been commanded to the Great General Staff were distributed in the various sections. The Railway Section was always in need of help during the heavy winter season when the railway tables for next year's deployment had to be worked out. The men were broken in to the work by contributing their share to it.⁵ In addition, they were given weekly tactical exercises on the map, followed toward the end of the winter by more ambitious exercises supervised by the departmental chiefs and the quartermasters. Finally, they took part in two or three major strategic exercises given in the spring to the entire General Staff by the Chief himself. In these exercises the objective was to accustom even the youngest potential General Staff officers to envisage all decisions from the broadest possible point of view. Waldersee, in the final exercises preceding the annual selection, went far beyond the customary division or

⁵In all, the Great General Staff before the World War comprised around 100 regular members together with about 130-140 "commandeered" officers. Van den Bergh, p 170.

army corps problems and was severely criticized for it. Schlieffen went even further, and in addition included these young "commandeered" lieutenants in the great *Kriegesspiele* in which the whole General Staff participated for months at an end, to the intense dissatisfaction of many high dignitaries who found these officers far too young to lead armies—even on paper. "As long as they are lieutenants, certainly," replied Schlieffen. "Fortunately, however, they have the ambition later on to command an army, or if their aims are more moderate at least an army corps, or to assist a corps commander as his chief of staff. In war, however, such an army corps is hardly likely to operate alone. It will find itself within the larger formation of an army, in its turn within the larger whole of the army. Out of this subordination to larger units tasks will develop of which the individual army corps by itself knows nothing. The difficulties grow with the size of the armies." Hence the necessity of acquainting the future leaders as early as possible with them.

If this intense system of training, examination and selection for the General Staff prevented these young officers from benefiting to the fullest extent from the tactical and operational training given to them, it had other values. Under this Spartan system the future General Staff officers acquired the great capacity for work, the faculty of concentrated effort over long protracted periods, the ability to deal swiftly and effectively with huge masses of material upon which even more than on any special teaching or doctrine the peculiar efficiency of the General Staff as a whole rested. Characteristic in this respect is an observation made by Von Einem, then Minister of War, when he was apprised of the Kaiser's intention to make the younger Moltke Schlieffen's successor. Von Einem had been in the General Staff with Moltke and had seen that in his younger days the latter had tended to "take things easy." For that reason he deemed him "out of question" for the post, although Moltke had since developed into an exceptionally conscientious and studious officer. To Einem it appeared impossible by any degree of subsequent application for a man to make up for what he had lost, if he had not pulled his full weight during those early strenuous years.

At the end of the period of tentative "command" stood a third and final examination from which four or five out of the original class of 140 to 160 at the Military Academy were definitely assigned to the General Staff. During the whole of this period of probation, personal traits, the ability to stand severe wear and

tear, strength of character, and the gift for rapid decision necessary in a future commander or his assistant played a far greater role than at the Academy. Those who finally passed this triple test had some right to consider themselves among the elect.*

Normally by that time the young officers had reached the rank of captain. It was a rare thing for Seeckt to be taken into the General Staff as a mere first lieutenant. Rarer still when, with that rank a few months later, he was transferred as second General Staff Officer (Ib.) to the XVIII Army Corps in Danzig, and had to be hastily promoted to captain out of turn. On the other hand, this prompt transference to work with the *Truppen-General Stab* was the customary beginning of a General Staff career, alternating from that moment onwards between three different lines of activity: service with the *Truppen-General Stab*, service with troops (command of a company, battalion, regiment) in order to maintain close contact with the line, and finally irregular spells in the center and "mother" of all, the Great General Staff.

In the *Truppen-General Stab* the usual procedure was to start at the bottom as junior General Staff officer and aide to the Chief of the General Staff of an army corps; then move on to an independent job as sole General Staff officer with a division. After that an officer might serve as first general staff officer (Ia) with a corps staff. He could finally attain to the highest position within the General Staff except for command of a section of the Great General Staff itself—that of Chief of Staff to a corps command.

II

The key role of this position in the German General Staff system lay in the peculiar dual function of its holder. On the one hand, as in all other armies, the chief of staff of a unit was expected to relieve his commander of all technical details by organizing and coordinating the entire work of his staff, in which were, besides his own General Staff officers, several aides de camp as well as members of the legal, supply, medical, and theological branches of the military administration. All these manifold activities he had to supervise and represent before his commander but

*As in the selection for "probationary" command, rejection at this stage did not necessarily mean permanent exclusion from the General Staff. Some officers, not immediately taken over by it, might have a chance of being called later; others might find a career in the Ministry of War. In addition the officers who had passed through this strenuous training, though not so proficient as those taken over, composed a reserve out of which in war additional General Staff officers might be chosen.

should not become absorbed by these details.⁷ To that end the German Army, after Gneisenau's organization of Blücher's headquarters, developed the office of quartermaster in addition to that of the chief of staff. The special function of the quartermaster was to release *both* commander *and* chief of staff from the routine work for the general direction of affairs.⁸ In time of peace and within the comparatively narrow sphere of a corps staff there was no need for such a special coordinator. Thus the only officers who bore the name, but not the function, of quartermaster have been the departmental chiefs in the General Staff directly under the chief.⁹

In time of war each of the higher units (armies, army groups) has its quartermaster, the Quartermaster General fulfilling that function with the High Command itself. Because, however, the Chief of the General Staff in 1866, 1870-71, 1914-18, in effect combined in his own person the two roles of commander in chief and Chief of Staff, the Quartermaster General was *expected* to assume, in addition to his organizational duties at least part of the functions of confidential adviser in strategic and operational matters, normally incumbent upon the Chief of Staff.¹⁰

The exact nature and scope of this second, and in the eyes of the German Army, main function of the chief of staff, distinguishing him most pronouncedly from his colleagues in other armies, was never circumscribed. In fact, two outstanding representatives of the system, Hindenburg and Seeckt, expressly deny that the relations between the commander and his chief of

⁷It seems to have been considered something akin to "bad form" for a chief of staff to interfere more than necessary in the work of his subordinates. General von Zwehl reports the case of a chief who, in the excitement of the first encounter in August 1914, himself dictated in detail all the orders for a decision taken by the commander. On the query of his operations officers whether he meant this to be the standard procedure in the future, he immediately recovered himself with the words "No, my dear L, I was wrong in assuming part of your duties. In the future, you will draft all orders as usual." Similarly Seeckt, in his analysis of the Bulgarian Army, Spring of 1916, notes as characteristic traits the failure to entrust responsible work to junior staff officers and their surprise at the manner in which he, then chief of staff to Mackensen, issued orders to his young men, sure that they would be properly executed without any need for supervision. Rabenau, *Seeckt*, I, p. 377.

⁸See the sarcastic answer given to a curious enquirer as to the functions of a quartermaster by Colonel Hentsch, Moltke's unfortunate emissary in the battle of the Marne and at the time he spoke the highly efficient quartermaster of Mackensen's Serbian Army "The quartermaster does everything the chief cannot or will not do." Seeckt, *Gedanken eines Soldaten*, p. 156.

⁹The post of Quartermaster General in time of peace was created in 1881 for Waldersee, in order to relieve Moltke. In 1889, when Moltke finally retired and was replaced by Waldersee that post was abolished and instead three quartermasters (*Oberquartier-meister*) created directly under the Chief of the General Staff. Finally in the 90s the Quartermaster General was reestablished as Senior Quartermaster, in addition to the three others.

¹⁰In this sense in 1870-71 Lieut.-Gen. von Podbielski acted as Moltke's closest adviser in operational as well as in administrative matters. In the same sense General von Stein in August-September 1914 functioned as chief adviser to the younger Moltke. So great, however, became the pressure of administrative detail with the gigantic expansion of the military organization as the result of the war in the trenches, that when Freytag-Loringhoven, after several intermediate holders, took over the office in January 1915, he found himself completely absorbed by his administrative duties. Cochenhausen *Von Scharnhorst zu Schlieffen*, p. 193. Bauer, *Der Grosse Krieg*, *passim*. Freytag-Loringhoven, *Menschen und Dinge*, p. 263.

staff can be laid down in advance, claiming that they are too varied, too much dependent upon unpredictable personal elements, to permit of any generalization.

One may perhaps go even a step further and assert that this relationship not only cannot be defined in advance but is deliberately left undefined, that its essence consists in the fact that it is left open to adjust itself in each concrete case in accordance with the peculiar and unpredictable personalities of the two men.

Officially, therefore, the chief of staff is the sole responsible adviser of the commander, nothing more. The commander may take his advice—or not. His alone is the authority and the decision, his alone the official responsibility. Yet by virtue of his unique position the chief of staff is something more than a mere subordinate. His peculiar confidential status confers upon him a definite share in the authority of his commander. In the absence of the commander, or in urgent necessity, he is entitled to issue orders "on the part of the commander" even to officers, like brigade and divisional commanders, superior to him in service, age, and rank.¹¹

Yet this right to issue orders in the name and by the authority of his commander is but a superficial and insignificant expression of the extraordinary and unique position of the chief of staff in the German Army. Not even the reaction against the exaggeration and abuse of his powers during the World War has been able fundamentally to affect this position. By virtue of his role as a sole confidential adviser, the chief of staff is the only one who shares the general control of the whole with the commander. All others share at best but one aspect of this whole, he alone is the commander's *alter ego*. From this community of outlook springs an intimacy of collaboration without parallel in the strict hierarchical subordination of the German Army. Jointly the two men are expected to range over the whole, jointly examine its possibilities, jointly arrive at a decision. Frequently it will be the chief of staff who, out of his command of the details, will first formulate the outlines of a solution. But any suggestion that he should confine himself to that role and leave it to the commander to pass decision on his proposals would violate the spirit of their relationship which demands that in their common task the two men merge their separate entities as far as humanly possible.

As Hindenburg says of his partnership with Ludendorff: "I

¹¹Bransart, *Der Dienst des Generalstabs*, p. 44; 46. Van den Bergh: *Das deutsche Heer vor dem Weltkriege*, p. 40.

have myself frequently described my relations to Ludendorff as those existing in a happy marriage. How will and can the outsider sharply circumscribe the merits of each partner in such a union? One meets the other halfway in thought as well as in deed, and the words of one are frequently but the expression (formulation) of the thoughts and sentiments of the other." And again Seeckt: "Who commands we ask and answer anew: *one* . . . The commander directs on his own responsibility alone and he has to hear the advice but of one man, placed at his side, his chief [of staff]. Under four eyes the decision is made and when the two men emerge it is one decision. They both have taken it together, the two are one. If their opinions diverged in the course of their deliberations, on the evening of this day of "happy military marriage" neither spouse knows any longer who it was that gave way. The outside world and military history hears nothing of a marital clash of opinion. In this fusion of the two personalities lies the security of the Command. Whether the order is signed with the name of the commander, or whether the Chief, according to the German custom, signs it on the part of the Command, is of no importance. Always the commander commands through the chief and the chief's orders even older subordinate commanders have to follow without murmur because he can only order in the name of his commander. There is no appeal against an order issued by the chief with his commander; that would be tantamount to unacceptable opposition. How far the chief can go in issuing orders without the knowledge of his commander is a question that can be decided only between the two and cannot be judged by any outsider."¹²

In reality the relationship between the commander and his chief will not always conform to this harmony described by Hindenburg and Seeckt. Temperaments will clash, opinions conflict and with every desire to repress or overcome such dissensions, it may prove impossible to adjust them. In that case the only recourse is to break up the partnership and replace it with a new combination. For the peculiar measure of co-responsibility which the chief bears under the German tradition, makes his obedient acquiescence in decisions which he feels he cannot approve, impossible. Since the dissolution of a command is always a calamity to be avoided, if at all possible, the German military authorities are accustomed to pay close attention to personalities in forming a command. Identity of outlook and temperament will not neces-

¹²Seeckt, *Gedanken eines Soldaten*, p. 163.

sarily give the best results, they may in fact enhance some dangerous proclivity. As Seeckt contends, the highest ability of a commander may sometimes only be brought out by attaching to him a chief of widely different personality. Again, a judiciously chosen chief may succeed in offsetting what otherwise might prove a dangerous weakness in the leader. But always the combination of disharmonious characters is to be avoided even though the coordination of opposing temperaments may be particularly successful.

In such an undefined and undefinable relationship it is inevitable that abuses will arise. If the commander be old or timid or weak, or just an ordinary man incapable of coping with a situation of exceptional danger or difficulty, it may be that his chief will acquire an ascendancy over him far beyond anything that can be legitimately conceded even under this most elastic system and run the show. That danger has always been present in the German Army wherever reverence for the monarchical tradition has led it to entrust armies to the hands of commanders of princely rank, but insufficient military experience. This is offset by attaching to them chiefs of exceptional ability in order to offset their lack of professional competence or their age. The Prussian Crown Prince and Blumenthal in 1866 and 1870-71, his grandson and Schmidt von Knobelsdorff, and Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria and General von Ilse during the World War, are well known examples of the predominance of the professional chief of staff over his nominal princely commander. Beyond this category of highest rank there was, however, during the First World War, a noticeable general tendency of chiefs of staff to dominate their commanders. This arose out of the fact that the commanders were mostly men who had received their training, and hence their decisive impressions, in the older, more leisurely days of Moltke and Waldersee, whereas their chiefs of staff had been hammered into form by Schlieffen's burning zeal for radical measures and decisive victories.

This difference was strongly accentuated by the sending of select superchiefs to places of imminent danger to replace the regular chief and bolster up the commander. We have illuminating descriptions how two of the most brilliant of these, Lossberg in the West and Seeckt in the East burst into tense situations and took things into their hands. When Lossberg arrived in the headquarters of the 3rd Army, then desperately pressed by the Allies in their Champagne offensive of autumn 1915, he found

the telephone ringing and picked up the receiver. At the other end of the line Lieut.-Gen. von Fleck, a particularly distinguished officer, announced the projected withdrawal of his VIII Reserve Corps. "The withdrawal will not take place. The VIII Reserve Corps has to die if need be at the place where it is at this moment," said Lossberg. "Who gives that order?" "The new Chief of Staff, Colonel von Lossberg!" On the further inquiry of General von Fleck whether the commander had been informed of the order, Lossberg said: "I assume full responsibility and shall very soon repair myself to your command." Only then did Lossberg present himself to his commander, Colonel General von Einem, and inform him of the decision taken. When Einem expressed the hope that it would redound to the honor of the 3rd Army Lossberg replied: "That is why I gave it, your excellency, and beg now for its confirmation as the only possible action." In addition he asked for permission to visit immediately the entire frontline and issue the necessary orders without previous conference with Einem. Yet Einem was a commander of outstanding merit, who as a young cavalry officer had attracted the special attention both of Waldersee and Moltke. He had been commanded to the General Staff without having passed through the Military Academy, and taken over after the exceptionally short time of a single year's training. He had been one of the three presumptive candidates for succession to Schlieffen, and from 1903 to 1909 he had held the office of Minister of War.

Even more dramatic is the description of Seeckt's appearance in the spring of 1916 at the headquarters of the Austrian commander, Pflanzer Baltin, whose forces were then under severe pressure by the successful Russian offensive in Galicia. His arrival immediately precipitated a most severe conflict. "He came, saw and issued orders, as if I had been empty air. Ordered, disposed, placed before me completed facts. He did not even consider it necessary to inform me of the arrangements made."¹⁸

This tendency of many German Chiefs of Staff during the First World War to domineer their commanders and act behind their backs was greatly encouraged by the general "hypertrophy" of the General Staff system touched upon above. Already in time of peace the position of the General Staff officer and a portion of

¹⁸Pflanzer-Baltin, *Neue Wiener Journal*, February 17, 1929. In fairness to Seeckt it must be added that his preceding partnership with Mackensen during the Gorlice offensive and the Serbian campaign came as near to the ideal picture later painted by him of the relationship between commander and chief of staff as anything on the German side during the First World War. But Seeckt did not do as well in his relations to the Austrians, although he got on remarkably well with both Turks and Bulgars.

the chiefs of staff of the army corps was unique in the fact that he found himself under a dual jurisdiction—that of his immediate commander and that of the Chief of the General Staff. In time of peace the differences that arose out of this arrangement were neither important nor frequent. During the First World War, however, the existence behind the official hierarchy of the commanders of another hierarchy of their chiefs of staff, from Ludendorff at the top to the last corps chief at the bottom, in daily telephonic communication with one another and from time to time called together as a body without their respective commanders, inevitably created conditions under which an unscrupulous or excessively ambitious chief found no difficulty in undertaking actions not warranted by the general situation. It even gave such a man the chance for thwarting his commander's wishes behind his back. Ludendorff himself was the worst offender. He intervened directly in the affairs of the armies over the heads of their respective army groups, frequently on the basis of biased reports received from junior General Staff officers.¹⁴ He often addressed himself to the subordinate chiefs of staff, not to their commanders, and frequently offended them by his unnecessarily brusque tone.¹⁵

With the fundamental relationship between the commander and his chief thus distorted in favor of the chief, it was inevitable that his share both of praise and of responsibility should be equally at variance with the accepted notions. As early as 1915 we find Seeckt—always a stickler for military propriety, except sometimes when dealing with Austrian generals—deeply annoyed at what he considered an unjustified appreciation of his merits as chief to the disregard of his commander's legitimate prerogatives. And again in April 1916 he said, "but it is always the chief who is being praised at the expense of his commander. That should really not be . . . nevertheless I enjoyed it."¹⁶ The same was true of the responsibility and the blame. On the Western Front in particular it became more and more customary when there was a reverse to leave the commander in his place, but remove his chief of staff, thus indicating that the chief was held primarily responsible for it. Einem, who to judge from his diary seems to have particularly suffered from frequent changes of his chiefs, or perhaps only to have been particularly sensitive

¹⁴Lossberg, p. 326-327.

¹⁵Consequently his later fulminations against these abuses of the "General Staff System" and the necessity of abolishing them in the future do not sound quite so convincing as they otherwise might.

¹⁶Rabenau, *Seeckt*, I, p. 366.

to them, observes in a letter to his wife (July 8, 1916) to this point: "Grünert—(a conspicuously able officer, at the beginning of the war Quartermaster of Prittwitz in East Prussia and in that function chiefly instrumental in preventing a complete panic after the retreat from Gumbinnen, later Chief of Staff to Mackensen in Poland before Mackensen was paired with Seeckt for the offensive in Galicia, and ending his career as a distinguished corps commander)—has been transferred to the officers *à la suite* of the Army. For everybody that means: he has failed in a difficult hour. Only for me not. It seems to become fashion to change the chiefs at the most serious moments. In the Winter battle Hoeppner went from me, in the crisis of the Autumn battle, Lt. Gen. von Hoehn. Neither of them had anything to reproach himself for. Thus I suppose it will be with Grunert too. What is going to be the result of such a system, incapacitating the command for a time and insulting men without fault—I do not know. Commanders who have failed stay, but their General Staff officers go. Probably, because he has not imposed his will upon them sufficiently. As if that were at all possible. No questions asked—away with the damage. Curious institution!"¹⁷

Next to the chief of staff, the senior general staff officer (Ia) or operations officer, enjoyed a position of particular confidence and prestige under the German general staff system. Witness such outstanding instances during the World War as Tappen in the OHL under Moltke and under Falkenhayn, to whom, in view of the eclipse of the Quartermaster General, he became virtually the sole strategic adviser.¹⁸ There were also Hoffmann under Hindenburg and Ludendorff in the East, Wetzell under them both in the Third OHL. Together with the commander and his chief he closed what might be called the inner circle of the staff, which we find already in existence under Blücher, restricting his deliberations to Gneisenau and Müffling and considering all other members of his staff, his quartermaster general von Rauch not excluded, as outsiders whose attempts to intrude upon the deliberations or to influence his decisions were violently resented and brusquely rejected.¹⁹

Thus during a visit from an emissary of the OHL, the operations officer would normally be present. Difficulties that arose during the First World War led to the elaboration of a complete etiquette in order to ensure to each member of the triumvirate

¹⁷Einem, *Ein Armeeführer erlebt den Weltkrieg*, p. 238.

¹⁸Bauer: *Der Grosse Krieg*, p. 72.

¹⁹Cochenhausen: *Von Scharnhorst zu Schlieffen*, p. 108.

his legitimate share in meeting the envoy and expressing his opinions.²⁰

Despite his share in the deliberations of the inner circle the operations officer remained definitely a mere subordinate, possessing none of the co-authority and co-responsibility that gave the chief his unique status. Subordinate, above all, to the chief himself, whom he is not permitted to by-pass under any circumstances, having to put forward all his suggestions to the commander either through the chief or in his presence, as well as being excluded from the ultimate decision resting with the two men alone.

In all these conceptions the German General Staff stands at considerable variance to those of other armies, in particular the French. In their concern for the supreme and undivided authority of the commander, the French restricted the chief of staff to a far more limited role than he plays in the German army.²¹ Their emphasis was more on a division of functions than on the intimate collaboration that constitutes the essence of the German system. "It is precisely in order that the Army commanders should be relieved of the study of these questions of secondary order and yet of essential importance and that they should be able to devote all their care to the supreme direction of the operations, that they have had a staff attached to them for the details of the execution," said Grouard.²²

Thus one can say that if the application of the principles of strategy is the business of the generals, that of logistics is that of the staffs. One must add, however, that if the functions of a general and of his chief of staff are distinct from each other, they are related and not independent.

"In reality, they must live in a constant collaboration avoiding too narrow an interpretation of their respective functions (attributes) while remaining always conscious that in principle they are distinct, and that if one frequently tends to confuse them, it is due to the previous confusion of principles and means, that is of strategy and logistics."

²⁰According to this suggestion elaborated by General Wetzell (*Militär Wochenblatt*, 353. pp. 98-99) such a meeting would have to take place in three stages: (a) meeting of the envoy with the chief of staff and operations officer and establishment in writing of differences of opinion, if any, (b) provisional establishment of a decision by the chief of staff after conference with the operations officer; (c) report of the envoy to the commander in the presence of chief and operations officer.

By this meticulous arrangement it would be impossible either for the chief and operations officer to be virtually excluded from the deliberations of the emissary with their commander, as in Colonel Dommes' mission to the 6th Army in August 1914; or for the chief to receive the message alone as in Hentsch's reception with the 1st Army at the crisis in the Marne campaign, when he went away without ever having seen Kluck personally.

²¹Debeney, *La Guerre et les hommes*, pp. 295-296.

²²Grouard: *Invasion*, p. xii, xiv.

To quote General Serrigny: "In reality, the commander must have no cares for the material side. Everything which on his plane is not pure tactics (services, organization of liaison and communications, etc.) must be placed in the hands of a subordinate, responsible to him for them, as the commanders of the infantry, the artillery, and the engineers are for their troops. And the commander should employ him in the same manner as his other subordinates; that is, leaving them the maximum of initiative. This responsible sub-commander is the chief of the staff."

"Thus on each plane one arrives logically at the following organization: The general, conceiving and directing his operations, with his cabinet, formed of one or several officers trained in tactics who receive his ideas and work directly with him; the chief of staff, in charge of the material organization of the battle and in direct command of the services.

"Before the World War the official teaching had unfortunately put into the heads of the chiefs of staff that they were the emanation of their generals and that everything should pass through them. Many considered it as proof of distrust on the part of a commander, that he should claim to direct his operations without them....

"During the battle of Verdun, Marshal Pétain had organized his command as follows: He worked directly with me (Serrigny was his operations officer) at the elaboration of the tactical orders and his chief of staff took the executive measures that arose out of them. It would moreover have been impossible to act otherwise. General de Barescut had already a colossal task as chief of staff."²²

III

The result of the severe process of staff selection in peace and war was a compact body of exceptional *esprit de corps*, high individual ability, and remarkable homogeneity of outlook. To this the immense stimulus given by the unique status and prestige of the General Staff in the German Army contributed a great deal. Yet beyond this some definite features of the system can well be put forward as contributing to its high performance. To begin with the very beginning: entrance examinations to the Military Academy dealt strictly with military matters, not, as in other countries, with the candidate's linguistic and scientific abilities. Hence they did not favor as so often was done

²²Serrigny, *Reflexions sur l'art de la guerre*, p. 3.

under other systems, men with methodical habits of thought at the expense of more irregular or more original minds. Finally, although they were stiff the examinations were not excessively severe. In fact, both Schlieffen and Seeckt contended that most officers could pass them if only they cared to exert themselves. Thus really good candidates were not excluded because of the demands of academic perfection, as happened to Joffre in France.

Again, the length of the initial training, three years, contrasted favorably with that at most other similar institutions: France two years, Italy three, Austria two, Russia two and a half years. This was particularly true since the whole of this period was devoted entirely to basic tactical, logistic and operational training. The study of other arms, which in France, for instance, took one-fourth of the shorter training period, was relegated to the summer holidays. Against this must be set the marked superiority in 1914 of the French in the *liaison d'armées*, much commented upon by German military writers after the war. Finally, whatever the weaknesses and limitations of the Academy's curriculum, it avoided one error often found in similar courses, that of a one-sided tendency towards doctrinal impregnation.

The training of the German General Staff officer did not end with his years at the Academy, but was carried on throughout the whole of his career in the staff.²⁴ As Seeckt in particular emphasized, it was the peculiar fate of the General Staff officer that his time of learning never ceased, that he was again and again placed before totally new problems, to return after their successful solution enriched by the experience gained in coping with them. Of particular importance for this continuity of training was the fact that under the German system the officer who had passed the Academy was neither sent back for years to front service, as in Italy or Russia, nor, as in France, sent to work out his probationary two years in the *Truppen-General Stab*, charged with a task for which he was yet scarcely fitted. Rather he consolidated the theoretical knowledge gained at the Academy by serious practical training and instruction at the center of the Staff itself before being launched forth into his work.

²⁴This difference was clearly recognized and expressed by such prominent French military leaders as Bonnal "According to Bronsart in Germany the superior practical military instruction is given to the general staff officer almost without interruption from the grade of captain to that of colonel, whereas in France it is given to the future general staff officers only during the two years of their theoretical and practical courses at the *École Supérieure de la Guerre* *Conditions de la guerre moderne*, p. 289. And Foch, in the introduction to his *De la conduite de la guerre*, p. vi "The Remedy (i.e. the training at the *École Supérieure*) is by itself insufficient. The duellist who wishes to present himself in good figure on the ground is not satisfied with two years of fencing school for all his life; he will keep constantly in exercise."

Another striking feature of the German General Staff system contributing markedly to its efficiency, but also to the severity of its selection, was its tendency to concentrate the work in a minimum of hands. Owing to the widely different status and functions of general staff officers in different armies, any strict comparison in numbers is wholly impossible. With this qualification the approximate strength of the general staffs in the leading European military powers prior to 1914 may be roughly compared as follows: France 950 (of whom 650 were brevetés; i.e. general staff officers proper), Austria 500, Italy 300, Russia 1000, Germany 250.

This extraordinarily small number of General Staff officers in Germany is explained in part by the fact that many of the functions filled in the other armies by members of the general staff were taken care of by other bodies or institutions. Much of the central administrative work, for instance, was done by the Ministry of War; a great deal of local administrative work by various other agencies, most of the subordinate staff duties by the members of the *Höhere Adjutantur*. Thus it was possible to restrict the actual complement of General Staff officers with the various units to an absolute minimum (three to four with a corps staff, only one with the division; as compared with eight and three respectively in France, seven and four in Italy). Nevertheless, such extreme concentration, while favorable insofar as it kept the General Staff officer strictly to his own business, at the same time meant a strain on the individual, which only exceptionally robust constitutions could stand in the long run. In fact, one reason why the work of the General Staff was deliberately kept under such extreme pressure, was to eliminate in this manner all those whose inadequate stamina might otherwise endanger the effective functioning of the machinery in time of war. Einem, conducting in the middle of the 1890's a General Staff tour in the VII Army Corps of which he was then the chief, describes his day as follows: 4:30 A.M. rise, 5 to 7 A.M. study of maps, 7 A.M. to 3 or 4 P.M. exercise in the terrain, discussions until dinner, 9 to 12 P.M. elaboration of the new exercises. The capacity developed by this Spartan regime for carrying on highly difficult and responsible work over protracted periods under trying conditions proved of high value during the First World War. On the Western Front, in particular, success or failure of a chief of staff frequently depended not so much upon his intellectual gifts as upon his capacity for somehow keeping his strength under the

almost intolerable demands of a prolonged defensive battle. Lossberg, the "Bull of the Western Front," owed his spectacular successes not only to his ability for grasping the key of any tactical or strategic situation, but above all, to his abnormally strong constitution, which enabled him to carry the weight of the German defense during the battle of the Somme without rest for days at a stretch.²⁵

In addition to this capacity for intense work under severe strain, the concentration of work in the General Staff made for great independence and initiative of the individual members, *within*, a general homogeneity of outlook so highly developed that one member could take up without interruption where the other had left off. Within the somewhat rigid and hierarchical German Army, the General Staff was the one cell, where initiative and resourcefulness were held supreme over all other considerations. Max Hoffmann, Ludendorff's famous operations officer, once had to accompany a highly placed general to Russia. Finding at the station that he had forgotten their passports, he asked his chief to proceed without him, rushed home, took a special train to regain his party before it reached the frontier and—presented the bill for it to Schlieffen as legitimate travelling expenses. That bill was honored!

Perfection in his own particular lines was inevitably bought at a heavy price. The average General Staff officer was a high class military technician, excelling in all dispositions dealing with the movement of large masses, their supply, the organization of railway transports. In simple tactical matters his training was far less complete; outside of his own field he was helpless. This was particularly conspicuous in all matters pertaining to politics, the ignorance even of outstanding members of the General Staff contrasting most strangely with the knowledge of their French and British opposite numbers.

Hence the remarkable spectacle that whereas the German General Staff produced during the First World War a great number of highly competent operations officers, very few among the chiefs of staff proved outstanding. Moreover, even some of the best known and ablest were in reality only "glorified operations officers." On the Western Front more was in fact not needed. But it is significant that Seeckt, the chief of staff on the German

²⁵Lossberg, *Meine Tätigkeit im Weltkriege*, pp. 124, 134, 224, 269-70. The following extract from his diary is characteristic: "No rest from Sept. 25 A.M. to midnight Sept. 28. I slept with open windows so deeply that I heard nothing of a strong French air attack on Vouziers. Even the powerful detonation of a bomb falling about 100 yards from my window failed to rouse me. I heard of the attack only at 5 in the morning when I woke up." p. 177.

side who towered above his colleagues in nearly every respect, rose under the incomparably freer conditions of the East.

IV

After the collapse it was Seeckt who became the soul of the struggle for the maintenance of the General Staff. By the Versailles Treaty only the central staff, the Great General Staff, had been forbidden, together with the Military Academy. The General Staff officers with the ten divisions of the Reichswehr remained and still wore the old insignia. The central headquarters was carried on partly in the *Truppen-Amt* section of the Ministry of War and partly in other institutions. The real problem was how to insure a constant supply of adequately trained young members. Around this problem, rather than modifications in the distribution and function of the acting General Staff officers, the story of the General Staff between 1919 and 1935 revolves.

As early as November 1919 Seeckt announced a universal examination of all officers, in order, so he claimed, to gain a clear picture of the training and knowledge of the new officer corps. Among its younger members about one-fourth had no formal schooling except a few weeks' emergency course during the war. Actually, the plan was meant as a renewal of the old entrance examination for the Military Academy, now institutionalized under the title *Wehrkreisprüfung* and (a significant innovation characteristic of Seeckt's endeavor to raise the general intellectual level of all officers) made compulsory at a certain stage for every officer in the force.

A reestablishment of the Military Academy itself was out of the question. The prevention of the training of General Staff officers was one of the points to which the Members of the Inter-allied Disarmament Commission directed their special attention. According to Seeckt's biographer, it required all the ingenuity of the Reichswehr officers officially attached to them to dodge their ever-repeated enquiries. As a beginning, therefore, the selectees of this first examination were concentrated on October 1, 1920, in their seven respective *Wehrkreis* centers, to be given two years of schooling. This decentralization of the General Staff training, however, carried with it the danger of destroying that homogeneity of outlook, upon which a good deal of the efficiency of the General Staff had depended, and which Seeckt himself considered its most important feature. The experiences of the First World War had not yet been digested and the various *Wehrkreis*

commands showed a pronounced diversity in their interpretation. The result was that in some of them the young officers were taught tactical concepts totally unknown in others. As a first step towards the unification of ideas, Seeckt therefore issued uniform directions for all seven commands and from October 1, 1923, added a third training year for which a smaller élite were transferred from the *Wehrkreise* to the Ministry of War itself. Finally, in October 1932 when control of the Reichswehr had practically ceased, *all* three classes, meanwhile officially acknowledged as *Führergerhilfenlehrgänge* in concordance with the temporary rechristening of the General Staff into *Führerstab* under Seeckt's successors—were reunited in Berlin as the *Offizier-Lehrgänge*. Under that name they carried on for the next two years and a half until the official proclamation of the rearmament, when their old name was officially given back to them on May 1, 1935.

With the rearmament the demands for trained General Staff officers rose so rapidly that the *Lehrgänge*, then comprising some 140 officers as compared with 480 in the last year of the old Kriegsakademie, 1914, were incapable of meeting them. Under the acute stress the period of training was therefore temporarily shortened to two years; but this experiment was promptly discontinued. The problems of warfare had reached such a degree of complexity that it was with difficulty that they could be compressed even into the full three years' course; the more so as, under Seeckt's inspiration, the *Lehrgänge* had tended to devote attention to the general acquaintance of their pupils with the broader problems of the contemporary scene. The danger of letting the solid training, upon which the General Staff system had so long depended, degenerate into the mere inculcation of mechanical rules and a cheap, superficial smattering of general lore, was keenly realized. When on October 10, 1935, the Military Academy assembled to celebrate its 125th birthday, the Chief of the General Staff, General Beck, expressed both its aims and its problems in the following address which summed up the work both of the Academy and of the General Staff itself:

"Because the recognition of a correct idea by itself alone in no way implies its execution, it seems necessary to reemphasize on this day that the transition from knowledge to action implies as its foremost presupposition the schooling and training of the spirit in the military disciplines. It is the imperative demand that military questions should be traced back in their inner coherence

to their origins in systematic intellectual labor, penetrating the problem step by step. That demand must be fulfilled, today more than ever before, by every one who desires to lead. Only its fulfillment can give the necessary basis for the responsibility, independence and initiative of the leader.

"Such systematic thought must be carefully learned and exercised. To that end above all these years at the Academy are meant to contribute. Nothing could be more dangerous, than to follow sudden inspirations, however intelligent or brilliant they may appear, without pursuing them to the logical conclusions, or to indulge in wishful thinking, however sincere our purposes. We need officers capable of systematically following the path of logical argument with disciplined intellect to its conclusion, strong enough in character and nerve, to execute what the intellect dictates.

"The *coup d'oeil*, the so-called lightning-like grasp of a momentary situation, formerly so highly praised, can certainly continue to be of importance in many situations in land warfare. In general, however, it must be considered of less importance, at least in the higher regions of leadership, than an understanding of the situation matured out of an intellectual penetration endeavoring to exhaust all possibilities. Such intellectual self discipline is not 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.' On the contrary it gives the 'native hue of resolution' its indispensable undertone. Nor does systematic thought stand in opposition to intellectual mobility. For elasticity in the decision in order to exploit circumstances incapable of influencing or predicting in advance, the capacity of adapting oneself to a changed situation, the indifference against reverses—these all, if they are to be successful, require foresight and preparation.

"In this intellectual-moral education of our coming leaders to clear logical thought and energetic action I see the most important task of the Academy. If, on the one hand, the expansion of the subject has only served to increase the attraction and interest of the training for the real soldier, it nevertheless imposes ever-increasing demands both on teachers and pupils. To an exceptional degree it becomes, therefore, necessary to keep one's eyes unclouded, in order to separate the essential from the accidental and preserve beneath the flood of new suggestions and ideas a sober judgment and a sound vision."²⁸

²⁸Wissen und Wehr, 1935. pp 746-748.

Chapter Nine

CURRENT IDEAS OF THE GERMAN ARMY

I

German military thought is characterized today by a practically complete absence of the deep philosophical background out of which it was originally constituted by Scharnhorst and his circle; and by a consequent reduction from the radical and comprehensive theory of war developed by Clausewitz to a narrow theory of mere virtuosity in the conduct of operations.

In the center of that doctrine stands the concept of the *Vernichtungsgedanke*, coined, or at least first imbued with its specific significance, by Schlieffen, in order to express in a single striking term his emphasis upon the necessity of directing the military effort not upon any inconclusive, "ordinary victory" but upon a decisive act of annihilation. In this sense the *Vernichtungsgedanke* is meant primarily to press home the need for constant concentration of purpose upon the single aim of the speediest complete overthrow of the enemy's power of resistance. But in addition to this primary purpose, it contains two important corollaries. One is the rejection of any gradual "cumulative" strategy of attrition, the other is the endeavor to achieve that "overthrow of the enemy's power of resistance" through capture or physical destruction, rather than through the demoralization favored by French military thought.

With its insistence upon the moral organization of the mass for war, the French Army tended to seek the defeat of the enemy primarily in the moral disaggregation of his forces in the attempt to reduce them to a panicky, incoherent mass. This idea we find running throughout French military thought from Napoleon, through Ardant du Picq, Foch, Montaigne, and Serrigny, who gave it particularly a clean expression in this *théorie de la peur*.

In contrast, the German idea from Clausewitz onwards has always been not to trust moral effect alone, but to make a thorough job of the enemy's destruction. "If one compares Clausewitz and Foch," comments Reinhardt "one will see that

Foch before the World War strongly emphasized the demoralization of the enemy as the military objective; whereas Clausewitz, thinking more coolly and more comprehensively, reminded his readers that the capture or killing of the enemy constitutes in the tactical sphere the final destruction of his ability to fight on, whereas his moral overthrow constitutes only a conditioned, or generally only a temporary elimination."

The ultimate logical consequence of the *Vernichtungsgedanke* in the sense of the physical elimination of the opponent is the idea of the complete encirclement, the "Cannae" as Schlieffen called it after Hannibal's classical achievement in the Second Punic War. As he developed it in the writings of this last period (1909-1912), he opened up a trail that since has run from Tannenberg to Kutno in the Polish campaign, to the abortive Cannae in the West in 1940 (cheated of its end by the miracle of Dunkirk), to the *Keil and Kessel* system of the early Russian battles.

Closely connected with the *Vernichtungsgedanke* is the insistence if possible upon a radical solution at one blow. This may not always be achievable. It was not in Poland, where the mass of the Polish forces had first to be broken up into convenient fragments before these could be effectively encircled and forced to surrender. It was not possible in the West, where first the Dutch army had to be forced out of the field by a separate capitulation and the left, northern wing of the Allies encircled, while the bulk of their forces was contained south of the Somme. Nor was it possible in Russia. But in general the constant endeavor of the German Army has been to settle all campaigns in as few major actions as possible, even if such a radical solution involves running incomparably greater risks than with less ambitious procedures.

Such a strategy places the highest possible strain upon the resourcefulness and the character of the commander. However careful his planning, the unpredictable reaction of his opponent and the even more unpredictable vagaries of chance will threaten him not only with the breakdown of all his plans, but with his own annihilation should he persist in them.

To achieve his objective in the teeth of all these obstacles the commander must combine unbending tenacity in the pursuit of his objective with the utmost suppleness in devising expedients that will enable him to *bend* the recalcitrant events to the end sought. He must know with the nicest of calculations exactly how long he may persist in endeavoring to carry through his

intention to a successful conclusion, but equally so how to break it off when his strategic instinct warns him that the attempt has become plainly hopeless—otherwise a “Verdun,” “an 8th of August, 1918,” or a “Stalingrad” will be the inevitable result. It is this peculiar combination of firmness of purpose with complete elasticity in ways and means, the “strategy of expedients” or “strategy without system,” that the German army strives to inculcate in all its commanders from the highest to the lowest.

These closely correlated ideas, the *Vernichtungsgedanke*, the quest for a radical solution at one blow, or with a minimum of blows, and the “undeviating thrust” as Captain Cyril Falls has well termed this tenacious elastic strategy, can be interpreted as forming together one facet of the current German war doctrine. The second facet is dominated by the idea the *totale Anschauung des Gegners und der Lage*.¹ What is meant thereby is the appreciation of a given military situation, strategic, operational or tactical, not as a bundle of isolated, individual facts, but as an organic whole, so that the creative power and the spirit of the commander can discern the hidden possibilities and realize them in a “creative solution.”

Thus this idea of the *totale Anschauung* or *Ganzheitsbild* links up this second group with the emphasis upon the elasticity of approach which we have tried to analyze above in discussing the “undeviating thrust.” Because the grasp of the situation is all comprehensive, it provides the presupposition of concentrating the decision truly upon the decisive point, the *Schwerpunkt*.

Thereby we come in our analysis to a notion that has been made familiar to the Anglo-Saxon public in this war in the narrowly tactical sense of “thrustpoint” or “rolling-up point.” Its real significance is, however, very much broader. *Schwerpunkt*, unlike *Vernichtungsgedanke* is not a specific military term, but a good German colloquial word signifying “center of gravity.” In that sense it has been applied to military matters for some time, apparently first by Clausewitz, and has come to assume the specific significance of “concentrating the gist of a situation into one decisive point,” much in the manner in which “economy of force” has assumed that peculiar connotation in French and British military thought. “An attack without a *Schwerpunkt* is like a man without character,” is a famous saying of Field Marshal von Hindenburg, constantly quoted in the German

¹Cf. Lieut. Gen. Bremer, “Die Grundlagen der Politik und Strategie Frankreichs” in *Militärwissenschaftliche Rundschau*, 1942, No. 1, p. 19.

Army. The more, therefore, the German Army under the influence of the *Vernichtungsgedanke* has tended to concentrate each action into a "decisive solution," the notion of the *Schwerpunkt-bildung* has become the fundamental presupposition of every action, strategic, operational, tactical, as well as of every arm: *infanterie Schwerpunkt*, *artilleristischer Schwerpunkt*, *technischer Schwerpunkt*, etc. The practical corollary is the complete ruthlessness with which the German commanders are ready to sacrifice their men at this the decisive point in the knowledge that victory achieved thereby will, by its all around consequences, amply repay such sacrifices.²

A further consequence of this second facet (the *Totalanschauung* and of the *Schwerpunkt*) is the deep-rooted German conviction that the *Whole determines the Part*, not otherwise; and that in consequence a superior grasp of the situation and conduct of the action as a whole will compensate for any errors made in detail by subordinate commanders. The logical conclusion should have been a marked predilection for strategic or operational over tactical action in the German Army, but although this tendency is not entirely absent, hard, practical common sense has, on the whole, tended to preserve its leaders from aberrations in this respect. On the contrary, the Scharnhorst school, Clausewitz not excepted, tends, if at all, to place the basic tactical above the strategic factor. With Moltke the two are almost equally balanced and it is only with Schlieffen that we arrive at a distinct tendency towards a one-sided over-emphasis upon the operational factor as a result of this "Strategy of the Absolute." When Ludendorff in March 1918, therefore, rightly decided that in the particular conditions of the "war in the trenches," the tactical factor would have to be placed above the strategic he was strongly taken to task by many of Schlieffen's pupils, notably so by Von Moser.

In the intra-war period the attempt of the German Army to recover strategic mobility naturally supported the tendency to stress the operational aspect (Seeckt, Groener), but the reminiscences of the First World War prevented undue disregard of the tactical element. Attempts after the first overwhelming successes in Poland to proclaim the strategical again superior to the tactical (Däniker), have therefore met only with partial response (For: Soldan; against: Wetzell). On the whole, the attitude of the German army to this vexed issue today rejects any rigid

²For example: Goeben at the eve of Düppel. Buchfinck, *Haeseler*, p. 20.

emphasis either upon the one or the other of these two correlated factors. On the contrary, it stresses their intimate, balanced correlation, permitting no permanent subordination of one to the other, but only a constantly shifting predominance according to the specific actual situation. Yet, in the last resort, the German military commander always tends to seek a decision through operational rather than tactical means, because it is likely to be more decisive, less costly in blood, and above all, because it is in the operational sphere that the superiority of the spirit is best able to make itself felt.

Thus we find German military doctrine, starting from the *Vernichtungsgedanke* and from the "creative solution" on the basis of the *Totalanschauung des Gegners und der Lage*, vehemently emphasizing mobile warfare as the form in which the German army can best exploit its peculiar training for the "creative solution." In mobile warfare the German Army feels it can best exploit those two capacities toward which its entire training has been directed since as far back as 1870, the *readiness to issue orders in the fog of uncertainty* and the *readiness to grasp the fleeting forelock of chance*.

If this be true of mobile warfare in general, it is particularly true of the characteristic form of action, the "encounter" (*Begegnungsgefecht*) claimed again and again in German military literature as a specific national form of action. A great deal of the analysis of French tactical doctrines prior to 1939 was devoted to the comparison between the manner in which both armies envisaged the "encounter." In an illuminating (anonymous) article: "Different Principles for the Encounter according to German and French Doctrine" in the *Militär Wochenschrift*, we find a summary of the aspects emphasized by the German Army.⁸ Beginning with the contention that the French regulations did not possess a fully adequate concept for the "encounter," the author then stresses the fact that according to the German doctrine the characteristic and predominant feature of the encounter lies in the uncertainty of the situation, demanding from the commander the willpower to act in unclarified conditions. Hence on the German side there is a tendency to lead the troops by the shortest route and as quickly as possible into action, the engagement, if necessary, of strong forces, an emphasis on speed of decision and action; the avoidance of all complicated and time-consuming forms, such as concentric action, as well as of

⁸No. 36 (1936), pp. 1600-1603.

delay for the purpose of clarification. Above all, the emphasis lies upon utmost simplicity and complete freedom from pre-arranged form.

On the French side the author sees first the general tendency to clarify the situation, with the intention of engaging the bulk of the forces only after clarification has been achieved; attack only if the enemy is clearly in inferior force, or if it is indispensable to attack to clarify the situation or gain vitally important positions. Otherwise defense, with the sole purpose of securing the undisturbed deployment. This difference of approach to the "encounter" is traced by German military writers down to the smallest tactical details. Thus Dr. Hermann, who compares the ideas underlying French and German artillery methods, after conceding the French artillery officer a much better mathematical training than his German opposite number as well as untiring zeal in the exploitation of this asset, clearly indicates his preference for the rough and ready German methods, largely because of their greater scope for a "creative solution" (even on the small "artilleristic" scale) and their adaptability to the rapid and unpredictable changes of the encounter.⁴

To this pronounced predilection on the part of the German Army for mobile warfare and the encounter must be added a no less conspicuous preference for the attack. There is probably no army in the world which is not inclined to stress the moral and material advantages of the initiative and the attack. But the German Army, while endeavoring to avoid any undue disparagement or neglect of the defense, tends to go further than most in extolling and glorifying by every possible means the traditional *Angriffsgeist* as the most precious heirloom of the German soldier. In the swift and irresistible onrush in which from the days of the Romans his forefathers used to overrun their opponents, the German soldier is taught to see not only a national heritage, but the surest means to achieve his objective at a minimum of sacrifice.

This emphasis and even overemphasis upon the *Angriffsgeist* as a kind of national virtue, has had the drawback of instilling in German public consciousness an aversion to the defense, and still more to evasive action, which even the prestige of Clausewitz has been unable to overcome. No other element of his doctrine aroused such fierce opposition as his contention that the defense was the stronger form of action, or caused such profound and

⁴"Der Officer als Mathematiker," in *Wehrtechnische Monatshefte* (1938)

widespread misunderstandings. Not even the sanguinary lessons of St. Privat were able to make his views more acceptable, and it took the overwhelming strengthening of the defense in the First World War to convince the German Army that there was something in the views of Clausewitz. In the Reichswehr period, particularly under Seeckt, the defense was strongly if never exclusively emphasized, but with the rearmament, popular favor swung rapidly back again to the traditional form, and with the early overwhelming success in the present war, the wheel had run a full turn again. In his broadcast of March 1, 1943, General Dittmar found it necessary to go to extreme lengths in order to persuade his hearers that a retreat was not necessarily tantamount to a disaster: "We have until now tended," he said, "the people even more than the Wehrmacht, to regard the strategic offensive as the only legitimate form of war. Everything that did not belong in it went against our grain, to say the least. Even a mere standstill called for the outbursts of impatience and fretting. The idea of an actual retreat, as we have seen from many questions reaching us (these days) remained completely inconceivable to large groups of our people.

"It is a moot question, what particular reasons may have caused (these) large groups to feel any other form of warfare than the strictest offensive as a psychological burden. Among them we may conceive hereditary traits of the Germanic nature, the unconditional will to attack, that *furor teutonicus* which even at the time of the first appearance of our forefathers in history used to cast terror into the hearts of our opponents.

"It may, however, equally be fresh memories of the days of the First World War. The impressions, above all, of the ex-soldiers are still dominated by their personal experiences of the defense battles with their many painful memories. That besides pure attack and defense there are others, more elastic and hence more elegant forms of warfare, could not reveal itself under the narrow limits of space imposed by the conditions of the Western Front in that conflict. Where, however, the majority of the old frontfighters in the West experienced a retreat, it was already overshadowed by the tragedy of the imminent breakdown of the home front."

II

All these tendencies in the German military outlook; the insistence upon the estimate of the concrete situation on its own

particular merits untrammelled by the dictates of any general doctrine, the stressing of the creative solution and the elastic tenacity of its execution, the emphasis upon the predominance of the whole over the part, the strategic over the tactical decision, culminate in the extraordinary significance attributed to the supreme commander, the *Feldherr*. In the *Feldherr*, literally the master of the field of battle, German thought has concentrated a whole world of half-conscious sentiments and emotions from which they draw a glorified picture of the war leader as a man unlike other mortals. As far back as 1805 we find old Berenhorst writing in his aphorisms: "He who is born to be a *Feldherr* is the son of fate and nature which combine at an unpredictable hour to call such a creation into being. *Feldherr* is his name already at his birth." Almost exactly a hundred years later Schlieffen, in a famous essay which more than anything else has served to impress and clarify the German picture of the *Feldherr*, takes up these ideas with almost identical words: "At the head of an army a supreme commander, a commander-in-chief, a generalissimo, a *général en chef*, is placed. The sovereign, the head of the government, who entrusts him with that office believes to possess in him a *Feldherr*. Not unfrequently he will find himself disillusioned. For a *Feldherr* is not appointed, but born and predestined." In this sense of the exceptional, rather than as a rank in the military hierarchy or as a mere title, the term *Feldherr* has been further popularized by the adherents of Ludendorff, habitually referring to him as "the *Feldherr* of the World War" in order to express his dominant role in contrast to the relative insignificance of his official rank and position.

Two aspects of the *Feldherr* are adduced in explanation of this homage accorded to him: the *unique difficulties of his task* and the *unique responsibility resting on his shoulders*. "The task of the *Feldherr*," Schlieffen goes on, "is to destroy or at least completely to overthrow an opponent, even a stronger one, of whom he does not know where he stands, whither he goes, what he intends. The way he has chosen to achieve that goal, he must pursue pertinaciously, overcome with energy all obstacles, find rapidly expedients to meet unforeseen developments, pursue success to the utmost, support reverses with fortitude. In order to achieve that something superhuman, supermundane must inspire him, call it genius or by whatever other name you will. Of the support and the protection of a higher power he must be convinced."

The almost superhuman task of the *Feldherr* becomes harder still through the fact that alone among the commanders he cannot gather strength from the support given by a superior. The *Feldherr* stands alone at the head of the military hierarchy, responsible to the political leader who called him, and more responsible still to his people and history. This responsibility is the heavier to bear the more the fate of all his comrades in arms and of the entire nation is concentrated in his hands. The catastrophe of the Marne demonstrated in classical fashion, how all the bravery and efforts of millions, the sacrifices and the blood of hundred of thousands may prove unavailing, if the spirit or the will of the *Feldherr* proves unequal to his task.

Spirit and will must be perfectly developed and of equal strength if the *Feldherr* is to carry his heavy burdens successfully. Neither of the two can compensate lack or weakness of the other. "Spirit without will is powerless," says Seeckt, "Will without spirit is blind." The will to penetrate through all the misleading and confusing incidents on the surface to the hard but heart-warming facts at the depths must uphold the *Feldherr* in the severe task of self-education. For if the *Feldherr* is born as such, he must work harder than anybody else to develop the gifts which nature and fate have endowed him with. "If the budding *Feldherr* relies upon his genius, the support and the protection of a higher power," warns Schlieffen, "his chances of victory will be tenuous indeed. Through intense labor he must prepare himself for his high function, develop his powers of the spirit and the intellect to perfect lucidity . . . How much knowledge is not required of the *Feldherr*? He is not only expected to know how to lead an army to victory; he must also create it, arm it, equip it, train it, clothe it, feed it. Perhaps others may be found to take over these tasks from him. They are not going to satisfy him. The *Feldherr* cannot place himself at the head of any force. He must have his own army."

"Command of these technical requirements of his must be complete and automatic," says Seeckt. "Just so must be his appreciation of the dead and living material, with which he has to work, with all its characteristics and peculiarities. These instruments of his generalship the *Feldherr* must be able to employ with the assurance of a sleepwalker. In their application he must not spend his forces of character or intellect. If before being called to the highest position, he has had the opportunity of going through a school of active military experience, he is for-

tunate. His ability will grow in obeying, before it becomes ripe for command. If he is denied direct experience, learning from history and the schooling of the spirit through the solution of invented exercises must take its place. Both these expedients will accompany his experience, deepening and broadening it. To the training of his will they contribute only indirectly; but they permit the spirit of the continuous learner to draw from them a few clearly-determined, unchangeable, rules. These rules become part of his intellectual property. He will act according to them, without being conscious of it. Their acquisition will set his will free, giving it the firm assurance which true insight confers, not burdening him with dead knowledge."

Thus, through the long and weary years of apprenticeship, in which the *Feldherr* acquires mastery of his instrument, the strength of the spirit and lucidity of intellect thus acquired, not only broadens his vision but steels his will before the supreme test. "Energy," says Seeckt "is primarily a matter of intellect. Energy arises from the (willing) recognition of the inexorable logic of the things themselves. It is the nature of an energetic character that he accepts unqualifiedly and unconditionally the truths which face him. To that end the intellect must ruthlessly eliminate all prejudices, all preconceived ideas."

Thus the spirit of the *Feldherr* inspires and strengthens his determination to carry through a creative solution in the teeth not only of the independent and unpredictable will of his opponent, but of the not less unpredictable material and human friction in his own camp. These frictions may include an incessant struggle with his political superiors and his subordinate commanders. In addition there are the innumerable difficulties of gathering of information, the arranging of details, the forwarding of orders. To all these manifold sources of friction and the remedies against them German military thought has devoted exhaustive attention.

Summed up, this analysis of the technical aspects of the command of modern armies, spread over innumerable articles and more than a score of books, may be condensed into a few more or less universally accepted convictions. In the matter of the relation of the *Feldherr* to his government, Ludendorff's claim (in his *Total War*) for supreme leadership of political as well as military affairs in the hands of the *Feldherr* has been flatly and unanimously rejected. On the contrary his definite subordination to the will of the political leader, responsible for the direction of the war as a whole, in all its political, diplomatic, economic and

psychological aspects is stressed. Within that greater whole the conduct of the military operations is today conceived as only *one* element, not even necessarily always the most important one, upon which, therefore, in glaring contrast to Moltke's views on that point, policy may and in fact constantly must encroach with urgent requests on the part of the other branches. It seems most evident that this balanced conception of the respective roles of the supreme leader and of the commander in chief has in the course of the present struggle been completely overthrown by the steadily increasing assumption of control over the conduct of operations by Adolf Hitler. Its culmination came in his assumption of "real" in addition to "nominal" high command in the crisis of December 1941, a development which was supported in the ideological sphere in an ingenious address on the "Unity of Statesmen and *Feldherr*" by Colonel Scherff who claimed that the organization of the supreme direction of the state and the war constituted "a plane or organization incapable of any theoretical determination in advance."⁵ According to Scherff, "history provides only one lesson: that a people is only well led when a genius, that is, a personality of the highest individuality, directs its fate with unrestricted freedom of action. This individual is alone responsible for the future of the nation."

Next to the proper adjustment of the political and military conduct of war, German military thought has in recent years concerned itself with the problem of the relations of the *Feldherr* to his subordinate commanders. Prior to 1914 that question seemed to have been solved in the German Army once and for all in favor of the extreme latitude granted in this respect by Moltke in his campaigns and re-emphasized in all his teachings. Schlieffen strove indeed to replace them by the stricter control indispensable for the successful execution of his gigantic plans, but his endeavors met with strong opposition and his successor returned again to the loose methods of his illustrious uncle. Moreover, in the forty-odd years between 1870-1914 the belief that the victories of 1866 and 1870 had been due chiefly to the spirit of intelligent initiative evinced by some commanders had led to a wholly exaggerated cult of the personal decision of the "man on the spot" independent of and, if necessary, even against orders. The result was that in 1914 the conduct of operations, held none too securely in the hands of the younger Moltke, was repeatedly thrown into confusion and jeopardized by a series of unwar-

ranted acts of insubordination. In the West first the 6th and then then 5th Armies took the offensive prematurely against the wish of the High Command; the 1st despite repeated warnings persistently failed to secure its right flank by an echelon in depth; the 3rd at a critical moment in the campaign took a day off. Similarly in the East the consistent disregard of orders by the obstinate commander of the 1st Army Corps, Von François, on more than one occasion threatened to upset the plans of his superiors. The inevitable effect was a tightening of the reins with the progressive complication of the war in the trenches resulting in an ever more strict centralization of command, which in turn threatened to stifle all sound independence.

As a result of these experiences, Seeckt, after the reconstruction of the Reichswehr, undertook the reestablishment of a sound balance between the indispensable demands of strict discipline on the one hand and the necessary freedom of decision on the other. While allowing full scope to the legitimate initiative of subordinate commanders, he insisted with utmost energy upon the strict compliance with orders as the normal state of affairs; restricting the exceptions from this rule to a few cases carefully circumscribed in the regulations. He abolished the much-abused system in vogue before 1914, of testing the initiative of a commander by placing him in a situation requiring action contrary to the orders ostensibly issued to him, refusing to countenance any training designed to teach commanders to disobey orders. In the same sense he reduced the exaggerated position many chiefs of staff had succeeded in obtaining over the heads of their nominal commanders by restoring them to their proper functions as advisers. He thus reestablished the supreme and undivided authority of the commanders.

These reforms maintained and developed during the period of rearmament are clearly reflected in the conduct of operations in the present war. On the one hand we find the German High Command apparently keeping a far stricter hold on the general development of the campaigns, than for instance the younger Moltke. On the other hand a considerable latitude has nevertheless been given to subordinate commanders. Particularly characteristic is the endeavor of all commanders to be as near as possible to the scene of action, a reaction against the far-removed headquarters of the First World War. Not only that command posts are brought up as near to the front as permissible, but commanders are not expected to cling to these posts, but inform them-

selves in person of the situation in direct consultation with the local commanders.⁶

That such temporary separation of commanders from their headquarters has become not only permissible but customary, is due to the close attention given to the development of communications techniques in the German Army since the First World War. To this systematic exploitation and duplication of all available means of communication which liberated commanders from the headquarters and enabled them to follow and direct actions on the spot, the German military authorities attribute in large part their successes in the present war.

III

Like any human institution the present German system of strategy suffers from the defects of its virtues. The concentration of every effort, great or small, upon the most radical decisive solution possible, which it has inherited as its main inspiration from Schlieffen, makes for spectacular results—when the conditions happen to be favorable. If they are not, the ensuing reverses are apt to be equally severe. Above all the constant concentration not upon a reasonably secure success, but upon the optimum achievable, ultimately encourages a tendency to overreach. This is particularly dangerous in view of the general tendency of the German army for *à priori* decisions and the ease with which the intuitive grasp of a situation may lead to what Napoleon considered the greatest fault of a general, "making himself pictures."

Even if successful, the extraordinarily high tension under which such hazardous operations have to be carried through cannot but tell upon troops as well as leaders. Above all it is true of the supreme commanders. Recalling Ludendorff's spectacular breakdown in the autumn of 1918, German psychologists have devoted extensive investigations to the problem of fatigue through overstrain in commanders as well as the best methods to prevent it. During the first two years of the present conflict the long pauses between the individual campaigns as well as the rapidity of their successful conclusion greatly helped the German High Command to solve this problem. With the development of a continuous exacting struggle in Russia, the favorable phase came to an end. It is conceivable that some at least of the reliefs of high commanders on that front may not have been due

⁶Field Marshal Rommel, known for his sudden appearances at various parts of the front in North Africa, traveled in a staff car or observation plane. German troops called him the "Marshal of the Highway."

to internal conflicts, but to the necessity of giving the key men a period of recuperation from time to time. In this respect the German Army today is more favorably placed than it was in the last war, during the last two years of which Ludendorff had achieved such a complete concentration of affairs in his hands that he could neither delegate them, nor be released from them.

Nothing is more characteristic of the present German war machine than the fact that despite all its fervent cult of the *Feldherr*, it has failed so far to throw up any single individual overshadowing his peers to the extent Ludendorff did. Instead of a new Napoleon we find at the helm an almost anonymous syndicate; a team of a score or so of prominent leaders, whose individual characteristics, except for Rommel's have been as little evident as their particular contributions, and who appear to be interchangeable without serious difficulties.

This high degree of standardization of leadership in the German Army is not, however, without its serious drawbacks. Under the steadily increasing complexity of modern warfare, freedom and elasticity of action can only be secured through the mechanization of all staff and command techniques capable of standardization. But while the systematic application of this technique has served to regain a remarkable degree of freedom for the commanders, it has inevitably entailed two serious and unavoidable drawbacks. The one is the extreme vulnerability of such meticulously concerted actions to relatively small unexpected obstacles or hitches, which under a less highly geared system could easily have been overcome (the raid on Dieppe). The second, more general and far broader in its implications, is the inevitable necessity of tying down an army at a given moment to a certain standard fighting technique, much the same way airplane models have to be frozen at a given point, if they are to come into mass production. Any such freezing of fighting technique, however, while making for high performance and even, as in the German Army, a high standard of elasticity within the system, necessarily tends to make the system as a whole rigid in its adaptation to entirely new conditions. The more rigid, the higher the standardization of technique.

Perhaps this distinction between elasticity within the system and basic flexibility of the system as a whole may help to explain an otherwise baffling contradiction: how a force like the present German Army, constantly emphasizing the elasticity of its methods as the peculiar and superior asset of its system, should

yet appear to its opponents particularly inelastic in its adaptation to new and unforeseen conditions.⁷ The solution of this apparent contradiction may in part lie in the peculiar concentration of current German military thought touched upon earlier in this chapter. For the elasticity with which Scharnhorst and Clausewitz grasped and developed the revolutionary implications of Napoleon's strategy arose primarily from their exceptionally intense preoccupation with war as an organic whole, not merely with its conduct. In the course of the 19th Century, under Moltke and Schlieffen, much of this comprehensive approach was lost. The philosophical breadth of the early masters was gradually replaced by a mere virtuosity of operational technique. Even Seeckt was unable to reverse that process and the hectic evolution of ideas under the rearmament accentuated it still further.

The result has been that in this war the German Army has performed extremely well wherever the situation required mere flexibility in the application of its technique. Where, however, it has come up against a situation requiring a radical reconsideration of its basic framework of ideas, as in the Battle of Britain and in Russia, the limitation of its approach has made itself fatefully evident.

⁷See Stalin's observations on this point in his speech of February 23, 1943.

Chapter Ten

GERMAN STRATEGY IN THE PRESENT WAR

I

One of the noteworthy characteristic features of German military thought has been its insistence upon the importance of a clear, comprehensive picture of the situation-as-a-whole. Again and again we find German military writers and commentators ascribing the successes achieved by the German Army to an innate capacity of the German mind for the comprehensive grasp of a military situation developed to the highest pitch by careful systematic training, and contrasting it triumphantly with the inferiority which they profess to detect in this respect in both British and French mentality and generalship.

If this is true of the German approach to *any* situation, small or large, tactical or strategic, it is above all true of the importance they ascribed to the proper estimation of that situation which determines all others, on which victory or defeat primarily and predominantly depend: the over-all strategic picture of the war-as-a-whole. "The first, the most significant, the most decisive act of judgment," says Clausewitz in a passage that has been quoted over and over again in German military discussions, "which the statesman or the general has to exercise, is to understand correctly the war which he is going to undertake. He should not try to make it into something which, in view of the nature of its specific conditions, it cannot be." If that be true, what means have we to pierce the veil enshrouding the ideas of the German High Command on this decisive over-all picture of the war and its modifications with the fluctuations of the struggle? First, how can we judge from the conduct of the war the extent to which it will determine future decisions? Second, what inferences can be drawn from the present situation according to the general considerations of military thinking? Here, with Adolf Hitler at the helm, we are treading on uncertain ground.

Our primary sources of reliable information are extremely limited. Taken by themselves alone, they are open to many in-

certitudes. Hence, the inferences drawn from them need to be supplemented and conditioned by whatever information we may be able to cull from other sources which have passed the attention of German military censorship.

Among the various secondary sources which have not always received the attention they deserve, are the not infrequent discussions of the general course of the war or major sections of it, appearing in the German military press. Emanating from more or less accurately informed observers or semiofficial spokesmen in the wings, they are frequently dismissed as the private speculations of people without authority or discounted as propaganda. Both charges may be justified on the whole, and yet they need not derogate from the eminent usefulness of this material.

In trying to piece together a picture of German grand strategy in the present war we have to start from the fundamental fact that both its outbreak and political alignment ran directly counter to the basic conceptions that until a few months before had governed Adolf Hitler's policies.

Whatever the ultimate objectives of his schemes, there can be no doubt that the idea of an attack on Russia with the purpose of gaining the vast treasurehouse of the Ukraine and the exercise of a controlling influence on the group of loosely federated states into which the Soviet Union was to be split up, constituted the basis of all German ulterior projects. This was kept carefully in the background up to 1935, since the German Army had not yet wound up its program of clandestine training in Russia and was still powerful enough to act as a brake on the antibolshevik hotheads in the Nazi party. But it was frankly and openly discussed after the great change of German policy in 1935, which for a time broke off most of the ties between Russia and Germany. In the conversations held between the Führer, Goering, Goebbels, Schacht, Blomberg in the autumn of that year around the Führer's chimney piece, and therefore, commonly referred to by people in the know as "Fireside Chats," the plan of an attack on Russia in 1939 formed the basis of all discussions. High ranking officers of the General Staff frankly discussed its technical feasibility provided four indispensable presuppositions were fulfilled: Economic control of the Danube Basin; a free passage through Poland; active cooperation by Japan in the East; and finally, most important of all, benevolent British neutrality.

Thus, from Hitler's point of view, the combination of events that forced his hand in the summer of 1939 ended in the complete

revision of all his plans and calculations by plunging him into war against Poland, France, and Britain, instead of winning the signal diplomatic triumph he had hoped to achieve as the price of the conclusion of the Soviet Pact. In addition, it forced him temporarily to align himself with the arch enemy against the powers whose neutrality he needed most urgently for what he always considered the "real issue."

The speed with which the campaign against the immediate enemy, Poland, was pressed home to complete victory in 1939, was, therefore, not merely the result of the application of the new blitzkrieg strategy, but had the double political function of establishing on the one hand a *fait accompli* before Russian intervention could become effective, and of creating a readiness to compromise among the statesmen of the Western powers.

With the temporary elimination of the dreaded specter of a war on two fronts through the annihilation of Poland, Hitler was able to send the bulk of his forces into winter quarters not for rest, but for exploitation of the lessons gained during that first campaign. As a result of the experience of armored forces acting independently, the number of panzer divisions was more than doubled and the existing tanks considerably strengthened and improved. The training of infantry after the Polish campaign was said to have been so strenuous that the soldiers received the news of being moved into combat with sighs of relief.

Before Hitler could launch forth the entire might of Germany in so hazardous a venture as the attack on France, an indispensable precondition had to be fulfilled. The northern flank had to be secured against any chance of an Allied intervention.

In the World War that northern flank, despite Admiral Fisher's abortive schemes, presented no problem to Germany. The powerful fleet built up by Tirpitz served to make an Allied irruption into the Baltic an undertaking too risky to be seriously considered. In fact, in 1926 the retired Admiral Wolfgang Wegener, in a memorandum, had chided the German Naval High Command for sheltering itself behind the Danish neutrality and for its failure to realize the unique opportunities which an advance through the Skagerrak and Kattegat would have opened up to them.¹

¹This memorandum, published with some changes three years later in book form, became the starting point of the breakaway of German naval thought from the old Tirpitz school to the new doctrine evolved in the middle thirties. Known familiarly to the service as Hitler's naval bible, it appears to have first directed the German Navy's ideas towards the possibility of an occupation of Denmark and Norway. However, there is this difference between the original criticism of Admiral Wegener and its application in 1940 that such occupation was meant by him primarily for the purpose of preparing a base for successful offensive action against Britain, whereas the basic motive of the 1940 execution was in all probability primarily *defensive*.

Since then, however, conditions had radically changed to Germany's disadvantage. In 1940 their fleet alone was not powerful enough to dispute the entry to the Baltic. Then too the development of air power had alarmed German military leaders about a possible enemy occupation of sea and air bases in the inadequately defended Nordic countries. Such a step would serve to bring overwhelming sea and air power within a short range of the whole extended German northern flank.

These apprehensions together with guarded statements that Germany could not permit such a menace, were discussed with remarkable frankness by Colonel von Niedermayer, head of the Institute for Military Studies at Berlin University and one of the outstanding authorities on military policy, in a lecture on "The Baltic and North Sea" in 1937.²

The cardinal significance of the Scandinavian area in the strategic scheme of the war (both for attack and defense) was, unfortunately, not equally recognized on the Allied side. General Gamelin, approaching the war primarily from a continental point of view, was highly interested in the possibility of an action in the Balkans, where, through the formation of an effective anti-Axis bloc, he hoped it might be possible to rally a few divisions of good troops to the Allied cause. But he manifested little, if any, interest in the northern flank.

British leaders took a broader view of the struggle. But even they, on account of their early emphasis on the economic side of the struggle, were inclined to see the importance of the Nordic countries predominantly as a part of the Allied system of blockade. Their pivotal strategic role in the German war plan and the intimate interrelation of their control with the German action in the main theater of war, on the other hand, was not adequately realized.

Thus, when after weeks of feverish preparation the storm that had been gathering in the German ports broke loose at last on April 9, 1940, it caught the Allies, despite all warning and apprehensions, out of the picture and off their balance.

The Allied support promptly accorded to Norway was prob-

²An officer on the Bavarian General Staff and a student of the Near East, Niedermayer was called upon in the autumn of 1914 to lead the diplomatic military mission, which succeeded in 1915-16 in breaking through the British lines in East Persia and reached Kabul, although it failed to rouse the Afghans into an attack on India.

Decorated for this with the highest Bavarian order, he served after the war, as A.D. C. to the Minister of War Gessler and on the staff of Seeckt, and in 1924 was slated for the highly delicate and important job of unofficial representative of the Reichswehr with the Soviet Union in which he remained for nearly eight years. Returned to Germany, he established himself as lecturer of military geography and policy at Berlin University.

ably motivated more by indignation at this new and unprecedented act of aggression than by a clear realization of the vital advantages which the enemy had secured and of the imperative necessity of moving heaven and earth to try to oust the Nazis before their triumph was consolidated. The situation would have justified taking the greatest risks, provided they held a chance of success, and there was not a moment to lose. Yet, Allied troops waited inactive in their transports until the sea should be cleared of the enemy and then were at first directed against Narvik instead of to the decisive South Norwegian area. Perhaps even the unfortunate reluctance to risk capital ships in an attempt to recapture the all-important Trondhejm Fjord might have been overcome, if the significance of the Norwegian position for the general strategy of the war had been fully realized at the time.

While the conduct of the Norwegian campaign by the Allies, despite innumerable individual deeds of heroism, failed in the last resort, for lack of a clear picture of the importance of that area within the strategic pattern of the war as a whole, full realization of that factor inspired on the German side both the fanatical determination with which isolated units clung to their particular positions and the undeniably brilliant coordination of land, sea, and air forces.³ The calculated risk with which the entire German surface forces were flung into the fray in order to secure, at heavy but by no means excessive cost, a position vitally important for the German Army's successful offensive in the west, gave evidence of a degree of strategic teamwork that was repeated again and again on the tactical plane in the fighting around Namsos and Narvik.

II

When the long-prepared all-out attack in the west finally came, it was once again decided, almost in advance, by the superior grasp of the situation on the part of the German High Command. Before the Allies had had time to realize what had happened, their position was completely vitiated by the German break-through on the Meuse which caught their forces advancing into Belgium again off their balance and deprived them

³Adolf Hitler's obiter dicta may no longer seem reliable, yet his statement in the summer of 1941, that the order for the Norwegian campaign had been his most momentous decision in the war deserves to be noted.

The suggestion that Norway was meant merely as a trap in order to entice Allied forces from the main theater in France and the Low Countries can be dismissed as improbable. It runs counter to the entire logic of the situation. If the Allies had succeeded in preventing the German invaders from consolidating their hold on Norway, the effect on Hitler's general strategy would have far outweighed the number of troops withdrawn for that purpose from the Western front.

virtually of any chance of recovery.⁴ Without this element of complete strategic surprise, it is hard to believe that a maneuver so contrary to the most elementary considerations of security could have succeeded without a hitch. Even so, the German High Command and the Army Group von Rundstedt, which, having launched forth the panzer divisions through the gap was following them in forced marches to protect their flank and rear, passed anxious hours bracing themselves to meet a counterstroke from the main body of the French Army south of the Somme and in the Maginot Line.⁵

It was the intense anxiety for that extended flank that explains in a large part what so many military critics have branded as Hitler's most serious error, his failure to follow up the elimination of the northern group of armies at Dunkirk with an improvised descent on Great Britain which was then in a state of almost complete military helplessness. The necessity of eliminating the danger to their flank and the urgency for not giving the French time to reconsolidate their position, advanced by German military writers in support of that decision, were certainly reasons the weight of which can hardly be disputed. But they were not the only reasons for such a course.

The collapse of the Allies in France for the first time in this war placed the German High Command in a situation for which it was not adequately prepared intellectually. Hitherto all its campaigns had been fought with instruments of which it had a traditional mastery, such as the ground and air forces whose use it had developed far beyond its opponents. Only in the Norwegian campaign had the navy been called upon to play any appreciable role, and after the successful conclusion of the first surprise move it had relapsed into relative insignificance compared with that of land and air forces. Now, with the entire coastline from the North Cape to Bayonne in their hands, the German military leaders faced the prospect of a struggle in which

⁴And yet the reports of the first days' fighting indicating wholly unexpected pressure in the region of the Ardennes, contained at least a very strong suggestion that the Germans, exploiting the universal belief in the impassibility of that region for large forces, might for that very reason have made it the scene of their main effort.

⁵The two Army Groups that had fought in Poland, Bock and Rundstedt, had been moved into line to the north of the Group of von Leeb, which held the Westwall opposite the Maginot Line. While von Bock's Army Group stormed Holland and Belgium and in the second part of the campaign inaugurated the advance by forcing the lower Somme, later occupying Paris and advancing to the Atlantic Coast across the Loire, von Rundstedt's Group held the Somme, and in the second stage carried through the main attack across it against the Weygand Line up to the Plateau of Langres and the Swiss border. Meanwhile, the third Group confined itself to limited actions in front of the Maginot Line, until the successes of the other two had induced the French to withdraw part of the forces concentrated there; then it broke through from two sides, from the Saar and across the Rhine and rapidly overwhelmed the last regiments of the French Army which fought desperately until after the conclusion of the Armistice.

they would have to confront Sea Power, a power that had just given a spectacular demonstration of its miraculous versatility at Dunkirk.

In the years preceding the present conflict the ideas of the German Navy as to the function and role of sea power had undergone a profound and significant change. Adopting, under the influence of the rapid development of air power and of the light elements of naval warfare (coastal torpedo boats, mines, etc.) the ideas of the French Admiral Castex (whose five-volume work *Théories Stratégiques* was translated into German in 1936) as to the "expansion of land power over the sea" it developed the theory of the coastal zone (*vorfeld zones*) in which the overwhelming power of these coastal weapons was thought to neutralize and overwhelm sea power proper. With respect to the latter, under the impact of a reverse from the onesided conception of naval warfare as a military duel between the two opposing fleets which had so signally collapsed in the First World War, it swung around to an equally one-sided extreme of "oceanic warfare" conceived as attack and defense of trade and communications, deprecating and even ridiculing the outdated notion of a general "command of the sea."⁶

It was, however, one thing thus to eliminate the tried strength of superior oceanic sea power on paper and quite another to do so in reality. Despite the signal success which these new methods of aerial and naval coastal warfare achieved under the peculiar conditions of the Norwegian campaign, their success seemed by no means sure when called upon to operate across the choppy wa-

⁶These two ideas are somewhat differently reflected in the two most important pronouncements we possess on the German Navy's reactions to the present war. In an address to the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Wehrpolitik und Wehrwissenschaft* on March 28, 1941, Admiral Donner, head of the naval academy and perhaps the most independent contemporary German naval analyst, interpreted the conflict mainly in terms of a struggle between two such coastal zones, in which he saw the small British center of production and manpower encircled and overshadowed by the strategic position and vast industrial hinterland of continental Europe, united under German rule; so much so that he believed the enemy already defeated and irretrievably sunk "into the continent, irrespective of the political form German victory might give to that strategical fact." Donner conceived the present war as essentially determined by the peculiar conditions of coastal warfare and envisaged a return to the familiar forms of "oceanic warfare" only for the probable struggle of such a Euro-African bloc with the United States for control of the access to Africa, south of the bulge, across the Atlantic. In contrast, Admiral Assmann, head of the German Navy's Institute for Research in Naval History and Theory, in an address on changes in the conduct of naval war, delivered to the annual meeting of the same society only a few weeks later, while conceding to the changes introduced by submarine and plane only evolutionary, not revolutionary significance, laid all emphasis on the possibility of defeating the opponent by economic strangulation instead of military decision. Interpreting the German High Command's conduct of the naval side of the war as such an economic struggle and within a joint concept of strategy coordinating all three services, he claimed for it the credit of having, from the start of the rearmament, directed both building policy and operative planning upon "oceanic warfare" as the only effective weapon of sea power (*Wissen und Wehr*, 1941, No. 6, p. 228). A curious light on the identity of concept in all three services vaunted by Assmann is thrown by an article on "The Foundations of British Policy and Strategy" published simultaneously in the *Militärwissenschaftliche Rundschau* by Lieutenant General Bremer in which the latter took the British to task for precisely that "economic" conception of warfare which Assmann claimed as the decisive discovery of the German High Command.

ters of the Channel against the very heart of sea power, backed by a highly efficient air force. Nor was the Luftwaffe in a position to step into the breach. Despite all boastings by Goering it was as little prepared for the new task of defeating an unbroken Britain from the air as the navy was to conduct an invasion across an uncommanded sea.

III

In these circumstances one cannot blame Adolf Hitler that, despite the exuberance of his recent triumph, he should have attempted to circumvent these obstacles by another peace proposal. The reasons for doing so were probably not confined exclusively to the military difficulties of the task before him.

As soon as the Russian leaders had recovered from the first shock of the unexpected collapse of France and realized that with all resistance on the Continent gone they might have the Wehrmacht on their hands at short notice, they immediately had started to concentrate forces on the German border.

Thus, far from being capable of concentrating every man and plane on the highly hazardous project of the invasion of Britain, Adolf Hitler saw himself forced to divert an appreciable part of his land and, in particular, of his air forces to guard his eastern flank. According to Dallin, to whose thoughtful analysis of Russo-German relations up to the German attack on Russia we are indebted, it appears that for a brief time in the fateful summer of 1940, Hitler seriously envisaged leaving Britain to "stew in her own juice," and planned to throw his entire strength against his Russian ally—and arch enemy. It seems that the final decision rested mainly on the problem of transport. The bulk of the German forces could not be concentrated in the East in under two months, and the campaign therefore could not begin before October. That may have decided him to turn away from his momentary impulse to the pursuit of his attack on Britain.

While that reasoning appears in itself irrefutable, one cannot help wondering why, instead of embarking on so untried and highly hazardous an undertaking with only part of his forces, Hitler did not take a third alternative which combined the objectives of both without the disadvantages of either. If, instead of pitting his forces, time and attention in vain against the rock of British resistance, Hitler had left both on the Channel and opposite the Russians in Poland only such forces as were needed to assure himself against any major reverse, and had launched the

bulk of his land and air forces into the Balkans and the Near East, he might have won not only the next round but the whole war.

To realize how great a chance Fate had thrown at that moment into his lap, one has to visualize the extraordinary weakness of the British position throughout these regions. The entire British plan of campaign overthrown through the collapse of France; Syria was in the hands of Vichy collaborationists; German agents were active throughout the Near East; General Wavell had but a fraction of the forces which Marshal Graziani and the Duke of Aosta could combine against him from Libya and Ethiopia, and was desperately trying to hide by all forms of deception the weakness of his position; the fleet under Admiral Cunningham, handicapped by the loss of the French bases and forces, faced the far superiorly-concentrated Italian fleet over which it had not yet established that moral and material ascendancy achieved at Taranto and Cape Matapan.

Against this background, made darker still by the almost hopeless British inferiority in the air, one can imagine what would have happened if Adolf Hitler had realized that it would be wiser to strike at the trunk rather than at the root of the tree. If, instead of letting Graziani march to his doom at Sidi Barrani and Mussolini flounder ignominiously in the Albanian mountains, he had decided to support these ventures with picked forces of the size and quality of the later Afrika Korps, if he had concentrated his aerial blitz upon Malta, Athens and Alexandria instead of on London, Coventry and Plymouth and, exploiting the terror of his success in France while it was still fresh and undimmed by the reverses of the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain, had knocked with his legions for right of way at the doors of the Balkan nations, what could have saved Britain's cause in the Middle East?

No doubt the leaders of Britain, who even at the height of the peril took their courage in both hands to reinforce the hopelessly outmatched British forces in the Middle East with men and equipment badly needed at home, would have risen to the desperate occasion. But how, with the fighter forces in the motherland just sufficient to maintain the edge over the Luftwaffe, could they have dispatched enough to the Near East to stave off the full fury of a major German air offensive, without fatally weakening the home citadel? And even if that risk had been taken, as it could not have been, what hope would there

have been of getting the convoys through in time with German Stukas and bombers soon to be based in Sicily, and Libya? If Hitler had realized it, his position on the inner lines between Britain and the Near East offered a unique opportunity to turn the table on Britain and to apply to her the same distractive strategy which her sea power had enabled her so often to bring to bear upon her enemies.

Even the international situation would have been wholly in his favor at that moment. In the Far East Japan, recovering from the state of torpor into which the conclusion of the German-Russian Pact had temporarily thrown her in the autumn of 1939, was abruptly swinging her line of expansion from China to the South Seas. Even if that move could not have been coordinated with a German drive against the Near East, the mere menace of it must have been sufficient to distract British attention and disperse its forces. In the New World, on the other hand, a German drive into the Near East would have failed to arouse a fraction of the sympathy—and apprehension—evoked by Hitler's air attacks on the British Isles and the British people's heroic stand under that ordeal.

Above all, Russia at that moment would hardly have been in a position to intervene. Nowhere were the ultimate consequences of the destruction of the military equilibrium through the fall of France more clearly seen, or more apprehensively interpreted, than in Moscow. But the state of Russia's defenses precluded any precipitate action and made the gaining of time an absolute necessity for the Reds.

It was in the sixteen months of feverish activity between the Finnish War and Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union that many deficiencies in the Red Army were made good. From the lessons of that campaign and of the war in the West, a strategy was evolved capable of meeting the Wehrmacht with its own weapons and on its own ground. In order to gain that vital period of grace the Soviet leaders were forced to continue and increase their policy of temporarily playing ball with Hitler that led to the agreement of August 1940. It explains Molotov's visit to Berlin on November 10 of that year, and also explains why in the spring of 1941, when Hitler's legions were thundering in the Balkans and threatening the Dardanelles, the Red Army resolutely refused to take offensive action beyond its own borders. The Soviet leaders clearly realized that a successful German drive into the Near East was directed against and imperiled their own

position as well as that of Britain. But they were not in a position to implement their protests by effective counteraction.

Instead of attacking Britain in the Middle East, the Führer preferred to fling the whole might of his sea and air forces into the fruitless attempt to subdue the hated Island. Then the spurious theory of the coastal zones "shattered itself upon the solid rock of British Command of the Sea" while the will-o'-the-wisp of oceanic warfare lured the German Naval High Command into ill-considered adventures, the rashness of which was not revealed until it was too late. Thus the *Bismarck* was sacrificed to no purpose, and the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* lay immobilized for many months in Brest. Yet, had those three ships been available in the autumn of 1941, or later still in the anxious weeks after Pearl Harbor, when the American Pacific Fleet was crippled and Great Britain's already sadly overstrained resources in capital ships suffered their heaviest blow by the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and of the *Repulse*, what use might not the German Naval High Command have made of so powerful a squadron in its attacks on the convoys to Russia?

IV

One can imagine with what sighs of relief Hitler and his advisers must have turned in the spring of 1941 away from this baffling and profitless task to the new adventures awaiting them in the Balkans. Once again a fatal underestimation of the imminence and magnitude of the menace on the part of the newly formed Yugoslav Government gave the precise teamwork of the German air-land machine the opening for an even more rapid and conclusive victory than in Poland or France. The situation at the fall of Crete around May 30 was something like this: The Eastern Mediterranean Fleet was virtually crippled, the RAF in the Middle East was weak, Malta was almost defenseless, Rommel was on the Egyptian border, open revolt flared in Iraq, intrigues were rampant in Iran and throughout the Near and Middle East. The fact that Britain surmounted these threatening dangers does not mean that it could have done so if Hitler had decided to throw his whole weight in that direction nine months earlier. In the opinion of the most competent observers, Hitler still might have won the war, if he had been willing and capable of following up this advantage in June 1941 in the Middle East.

But although the world did not know it at that time, the die had been cast in favor of an attack on Russia nearly six months

earlier. As far back as December 15, 1940, Adolf Hitler had ordered all preparations to be undertaken. The decision to turn away from an unsubdued Britain in his rear in order to take on the Russian arch enemy is, in its ultimate motives, probably the greatest mystery of the war. Yet whatever the ultimate motives, there can be no doubt that they could hardly have prevailed but for the intoxication which their almost unbroken row of successes had spread in all ranks of the Wehrmacht—from the Führer downwards. But for the conviction that the superior mobile strategy of the German High Command would bring victory against any opponent and under all conditions it is impossible to understand how that decision to attack Russia could have been made. For, in contrast to all its previous campaigns, the German High Command now had to launch its attack in a situation full of uncertainties and wholly unpredictable elements. From many years of close cooperation it knew that the Red Army was a wholly different force from the brave but clumsy Imperial Army of the First World War. They knew that in equipment and training it was the Wehrmacht's only serious rival at the time. What even the best experts of the Reichswehr were unable to make out, however, was the extent to which the Russians, in the course of that tremendous transformation had succeeded in grasping, not only the externals, but the essence of modern mechanized warfare. The Finnish campaign seemed to indicate that despite all its equipment the Red Army had not mastered modern warfare, and so the High Command decided to stake all on a campaign for eliminating this most dangerous of all its enemies in the same manner, and with the same rapidity, as the former opponents.

By surprise and the unprecedented rapidity and force of its blows, it hoped to throw the Russian leadership into such a state of confusion at the outset that it could never recover the initiative. Thus it hoped successfully to surmount the two obstacles that had so far defeated every invader of Russia, the immense width of the Russian territory and the climate which left barely half the year free for operations under normal conditions.

The German High Command not only made no attempt to adapt the technique evolved for the special conditions of Western European warfare to the peculiar exigencies of the Russian theater, but also failed to detect that everything was by no means going according to plan once the operations were under way. It did not recognize that it was rapidly exhausting itself against a

deliberate and skillfully evasive counterstrategy on the part of the Russians. Victory was piled upon victory; the German armies moved up to the gates of Leningrad and Moscow—but the collapse of the great central offensive (October 3-December 3, 1941) upon which it had staked all, suddenly revealed that the German plan was thwarted. The Wehrmacht had passed the climax of its offensive power and faced the counterattacks of the victorious Russians as well as the horror of an exceptionally bitter winter.

The simultaneous entry of Japan and the United States into the War and the surprising success achieved by her Far East ally in the following months served to tide over the shock of the first major reverse suffered by German arms in the present conflict. The Anglo-Saxon democracies did not let themselves be distracted from the concentration of the maximum of effort on the defeat of the more dangerous foe. Their coordination was incomparably more effective than that between the two Axis sections, each of which continued for all practical purposes to wage its own separate war.

While the German Army overcame the Russian counterattack and the winter rigors of 1941-42 better than the High Command had at times reason to anticipate, its whole plan of campaign, not only in Russia, but in the war as a whole, had been irretrievably shattered. The great irresistible campaign of annihilation that was to have broken the Red Army of resistance and which had been triumphantly claimed in repeated communiques, had ended in failure.

When, after many months of stubborn defense and incredible hardships and losses the German Army, reinforced by unreliable satellite forces, was able to take the offensive again, it was no longer on the whole front but only on its southernmost sector and with limited objectives. The war that was to have been finished on the Eastern Front before the Allies would be able to intervene effectively in the West, threatened to become another struggle against an all around encirclement.

It is all the more remarkable that Adolf Hitler should in the summer of 1942 and early autumn have doggedly persisted in hurling his Sixth Army into the mad venture at Stalingrad, instead of diverting enough forces to deal Allied strategy a crippling, though no longer a fatal, blow after Rommel unexpectedly turned the tables on the British Eighth Army in May and June. The presence of even part of the forces vainly expended before Stalingrad might have enabled Rommel to complete his push

through to the Nile Valley. At a later stage it might have prevented General Montgomery from winning the overwhelming victory at El Alamein which began the final expulsion of the Axis from African soil and which may well rank with the battles of Britain and Moscow as the third crucial test of the War.

By the beginning of 1943 German strategy had thus come to its turning point. The disasters in North Africa and at Stalingrad were not isolated reverses capable of being repaired. They were the high watermarks of German advance. The tide of victory had apparently run out. It was no longer possible to destroy the enemy's armed forces and the main bases of Allied resistance remained beyond the Wehrmacht's reach. The entire picture of the war had undergone a radical change. A decisive success had become out of question and all that the German High Command could hope to attempt was to stave off defeat.

The full extent of that change was not immediately perceptible. For a few brief months in the spring of 1943 it seemed as if a limited measure of initiative had still remained to the German High Command; as if it still had the time and resources for a last desperate blow before falling back upon the defensive. If the African bridgehead had held out through the summer, the German High Command could have concentrated its forces and attention on the Russian front. But the unexpectedly rapid fall of the Tunisian bastion almost certainly changed these plans and the breakdown of the brief German offensive near Kursk threw the German strategy finally and irrevocably back to the defensive.

Thus by supreme irony of fate the German High Command found itself forced to adopt that form of general strategy which for more than a hundred years German military opinion had unanimously and emphatically condemned as futile: a strategy of "pure defense" with little prospect of eventually regaining the initiative and passing to a counter-offensive; a strategy of clinging passively to its gains and attempting to hold its opponents at bay in the hope of exhausting their willpower or splitting their ranks.

For such a strategy of exhaustion the German High Command could still count upon very considerable assets. The German Army, although partly diluted by hastily trained youngsters and men beyond their prime, still preserved a high degree of tactical virtuosity. Reserves were large. Equipment, at least for the ground forces, was ample and of good quality. Industrial pro-

duction had been effectively stepped up. The system of fortifications in the West had been brought to new strength. Against its western enemies the Reich had all the tactical advantages which the defender on land possesses over sea-borne attack; in a two-front war it held the strategic advantages of central position and "interior lines."

These very appreciable assets were, however, offset by the fundamental weaknesses of the German position: its lack of elasticity, its overextension, and its comparative weakness in the air. A strategy of attrition and exhaustion, as the examples of China and of the Russian campaigns of 1941 and 1942 demonstrated clearly, depends primarily upon the capacity for yielding ground on the largest scale. Except on the Russian front, however, the German High Command's capacity to employ such elastic defense was sharply circumscribed in every respect.

Neither in the North, West or South can the German High Command yield up the ring of buffer states surrounding the Reich without endangering its entire position. It cannot afford to let the Allies advance to the inner walls of the Reich because each advance means new bases for Allied air power. It cannot release its grip upon the enslaved peoples or their resources; it cannot risk the psychological repercussions upon German morale of a general, large-scale strategic withdrawal. It has to defend, or to attempt to defend, not only the inner walls themselves, but the entire glacis surrounding them.

It has to do so, moreover, in an uneconomical manner. Instead of holding the perimeter with weak forces and keeping the bulk of them concentrated for counter action, the German High Command has been forced to split up an appreciable portion of its resources in local garrisons. This has been particularly true in the Mediterranean area, where excessive geographical compartmentation of the Italian and Balkan peninsulas has forced the Germans to scatter forces in packets, offering Allied sea and air power the chance of isolating and overwhelming them in detail. The same is the case in Norway, particularly its northern part. Even in the West the gigantic system of the "Atlantic Wall" may in the end prove a doubtful asset; tying down forces in static defense and limiting the High Command's freedom of action, once it has been successfully pierced at any one point.

This overextension and brittleness of the German defense system accentuates its weakness in the arm which today constitutes the most important mobile strategic reserve in the hands of the

supreme command: air power. The inability of the Luftwaffe from the battle for Tunis onwards to give the German ground forces adequate support, has become a factor no less important in the deterioration of Germany's general military situation than the successes of Allied strategic bombing against the centers of German industry.

With growing quantitative and qualitative inferiority of the Luftwaffe, German ground forces are foredoomed to lose even such temporary, local advantages as they may gain from time to time. The Salerno battle is an example in point.

Thus at the beginning of the fifth year of the war Germany's strategic position seemed to have become hopeless although not in danger of immediate collapse. What Seeckt had written in warning ten years earlier had come true. Once again the graves of countless German soldiers far from home stood as solemn witnesses against those whose vain attempt to raise German might beyond all human limits had ended in destroying the very foundations of her strength.

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